The Dissertation Committee for Audrey Ann Trainor
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

Self-Determination and Postsecondary Transition Planning for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students with Learning Disabilities

Committee:

Alba A. Ortiz, Supervisor

James R. Patton

Audrey McCray Sorrells

James Schaller

Angela Valenzuela

Self-Determination and Postsecondary Transition Planning for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students with Learning Disabilities

by

Audrey Ann Trainor, B.A., M.Ed.

Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May, 2003

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to the participants in this study. Fifteen young men were willing to describe their experiences and thoughts about special education and a process that can be difficult and emotional. Their words made writing this dissertation a worthy task. I am also grateful to the schools, principals, and teachers who helped me gain access to the information that made their stories more complete.

This research project would not have been possible without the support of my committee, each generously offering their time and expertise. The mentorship of Dr. Alba A. Ortiz has been immeasurable. In addition to her wisdom and guidance, she had the ability to calm me at crucial moments when the stress of not knowing seemed unbearable. I am also very grateful for the guidance of Dr. James R. Patton, who was able to share his knowledge about transition through materials, words, and humor. Perhaps more importantly, he provided me with a glimpse of other projects that awaited my attention. Drs. Audrey McCray Sorrells and Angela Valenzuela provided me with gentle reminders about the meaning of culture and both gave thoughtful and thought-provoking feedback anytime I

requested it. To Dr. Jim Schaller, I am thankful for his expertise in the area of qualitative methods and his support as I worked out the kinks in my design.

I would also like to acknowledge the support of my husband, Trey Furr, and my sister, Gloria Trainor. Trey helped me through many a computer crash and late night panic. He brought my caffeine, food, and items I accidentally left at home. He willingly engaged in conversation and silence when I needed each. Without his love and support, none of this would have been possible. Gloria has kept me sane and listened to each of my obsessive rants as I toiled. She was my accomplice when I needed to escape the daily grind. Her work with adolescents with disabilities has served to inspire me. I cannot imagine having done this without having her right next door.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge my parents, Nellie and Jim Trainor for their belief in my ability to do complete this endeavor.

Self-Determination and Postsecondary Transition Planning for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students with Learning Disabilities

Publication No._____

Audrey Ann Trainor, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2003

Supervisor: Alba A. Ortiz

Self-determination has become a popular topic in transition literature. Most transition models include components that support student choice, decision-making, goal setting, self-evaluation, and leadership in Individual Transition Plan (ITP) meetings. Researchers acknowledge that cultural identity may influence transition decisions, and student and family cultural identities may influence their decision to embrace self-determination models. Yet the appropriateness of these approaches for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students with learning disabilities (LD) remains unknown.

This study examines the self-determination perceptions and behaviors of European American, African American, and Latino adolescent males with LD. Research questions guiding this project were:

1. What are the self-determination behaviors of CLD adolescents with LD?
2. How do CLD students perceive their responsibilities in transition planning?
3. How do CLD students perceive the influence of their parents and teachers on this process?

Data were collected through focus group interviews, observations of ITP meetings, and ITP document reviews. Qualitative analysis of data was used to glean information regarding how CLD students with LD behaved and viewed their roles during postsecondary transition planning. Participants in this study did exhibit various levels of self-determination and involvement in transition planning activities. The extent to which students were able to use self-determination during transition planning activities was largely determined by school personnel. Findings also revealed that subtle differences existed between groups and that further examination of diverse students' self-determination perceptions and practices is warranted. Common experiences across groups indicated that the process of transition planning as implemented in the participating schools was not

conducive to student involvement or self-determination. Current special education self-determination models must address contextual/environmental demands within which students are expected to utilize self-determination skills and attitudes.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Teaching students with learning disabilities (LD) to be self-determining during the transition from high school to adulthood is considered good special education practice (Field, 1996). Encouraging students with LD to set goals, make choices, and self-assess, which are key components in self-determination models, may increase their successful transition into adulthood. Similarly, acknowledging and responding to the needs of diverse students during transition planning is emphasized in both research and legislation (Greene & Nefsky, 1999). The compatibility of these two preferred practices, however, is unclear. Students with LD from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds may differ from members of the dominant group in their practice and preference for becoming self-determining. Although current demographic trends indicate that the percentage of CLD students in the U.S. exceeds 30% nationwide and 50% in seven states and many urban school districts (IDEA, 1997), the current body of self-determination research does not comprehensively consider the strengths and needs of the CLD population, which may contribute to their struggle for successful transition from high school to adulthood.

To be a special education student of color may be doubly jeopardizing to successful postsecondary transition. Consider current dropout rates from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 1999a). In 1998, approximately 11% of high

schools students dropped out. While this rate represents a decline in the national dropout rate, close examination of dropout statistics reveals that group dropout rates vary by race/ethnicity. For example, the dropout rate for Asians was 4.3%, for European Americans was 7.3%; for African Americans, 12.6%; and for Latinos, 28.6%. Consider also that outcome studies show that between 36% and 56% of students with LD leave high school without a diploma or certificate of completion (Collet-Klingenberg, 1998). Using the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) database from the late 1980s, Blackorby and Wagner (1996) found that service provisions and outcomes for people with disabilities vary in relation to race. European American youth with disabilities obtained employment and wages at higher rates than did African American and Latino youth with disabilities. Access to services that increase successful postsecondary transition is crucial for CLD students. Disproportionate representation in special education continues to be problematic (IDEA, 1997), particularly when the outcomes for CLD students are not comparable to those of European American students.

Concern about student outcomes has made postsecondary transition a focal point for special education policy and practice. For example, the Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1997 (IDEA, 1997) lowered the age at which transition planning should begin from 16 to 14, expanded transition planning provisions to include needed linkages from high school to postsecondary life, and emphasized

specific mandates for family and student participation in the design of the individual education plan (IEP) which includes the individual transition plan (ITP). The professional literature is replete with recommendations for teachers to solicit the active participation of both the students with LD and their families during transition planning (Blalock & Patton, 1996; Morningstar, Turnbull, & Turnbull, 1995). Self-determination has been posited as an important link in helping students with LD experience personal fulfillment and successful adult living (Field, 1996).

Quite often student participation in postsecondary transition planning is referred to as "self-determination" (Collet-Klingenberg, 1998; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). By definition, self-determination includes self-knowledge, freedom of choice, and autonomy (Wehmeyer, 1995a) and is steeped in the concepts of normalization and independence (Schloss, Alper, & Jayne, 1994). Yet these values, as well as their manifestations (e.g., living outside the family home), as acceptable or preferred outcomes (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996), are culturally relative. Because values can differ both inter-culturally and intra-culturally among community members (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997), CLD students transitioning from special education into adult life may approach this transition with a variety of perspectives. Additionally, students may maintain different values than those of their parents and families.

A review of the literature in self-determination during postsecondary transition for students with LD, as well as the influence of cultural values on this process, reveals

gaps in knowledge about postsecondary transition service provision to CLD students and families. Examining the intersection of cultural values and self-determination in postsecondary planning is an important step in improving outcomes for students with LD. Yet, emphasis on self-determination by researchers and practitioners from the dominant culture may not thoroughly reflect the characteristics of the parent/child relationships in CLD families during transition planning. These students must balance the sometimes-conflicting demands of home and school. We need to understand how to better help individuals plan for postsecondary transition in such a way that they feel competent meeting the demands of the communities in which they choose to live.

While numerous researchers (García, Mendez-Pérez, & Ortiz, 2000; Harry, 1992; Harry, Rueda, & Kalyanpur, 1999), have explored issues of CLD parent participation in the special education process, few have focused on postsecondary transition planning. Similarly, little is known about CLD student participation during this process. Since communities and families share cultural values that may differ from those accepted by members of the school community, it is important to examine the impact of dominant culture values on the practice of special education research and service delivery. August and Hakuta (1997) argue fervently for the importance of such research in improving the education of these students.

Gathering input from students from a variety of ethnicities and cultural backgrounds regarding their perceptions and behaviors involving self-determination

during postsecondary transition, as has been the purpose of this study, increases the self-determination knowledge base for CLD students. Given the impact of cultural identities on participation in educational programs, data regarding CLD students' behaviors and preferences for self-determination in transition are essential. Currently, students with disabilities such as LD are not achieving postsecondary success at acceptable rates (IDEA, 1997).

This study also has the potential to augment the transition planning knowledge base. Researchers and practitioners tend to overlook the extensive transition-related needs of students with LD because they wrongly assume that these students are able to move from high school to adulthood with little assistance (Dunn, 1996). Self-determination for students with LD may develop in ways that are different from students with other disabilities. Promoting self-determination among this population is complicated by the fact that many students with LD do not consider the implications of having a disability and are not familiar with their own strengths and weaknesses (Field, 1996).

Ultimately, knowledge gained by interviewing students on this topic has the potential to improve the lives of CLD students with disabilities and their families. Understanding transition needs of CLD students has the potential to increase the appropriateness of services and improve transition outcomes. Existing models of self-determination have given students' cultural identities and family contexts only cursory

attention. Although many self-determination models incorporate parent-training components and allude to the home environment, few address that parents and home environments vary considerably. CLD parents often make meaning of their children's disability in ways that are unlike the dominant group (Skinner, Bailey, Correa, and Rodriguez, 1999). For example, some people believe that their children with disabilities are a result of divine intervention, potentially influencing parents' facilitation of their children's self-determination (Bailey, Skinner, Rodriguez, Gut, & Correa, 1999; Harry, 1992). While this project has not delved into parenting styles per se, student participants have provided valuable descriptions of their parents' expectations of them as they transition into adulthood.

A second potential contribution to theory and practice is the project's research methodology. A common perception in the field of education is that teachers do not make instructional decisions based on research. Qualitative studies, however, have the potential to impact teachers' understanding and application of scholarly research in the field of special education (Anzul, Evans, King, & Tellier-Robinson, 2001). Utilizing qualitative research to close the gap in self-determination/postsecondary transition research provides greater depth to current insights. Hearing student voices may help teachers "put a face" with the research and aid in their ability to make sound, research-based decisions about practices.

This study examined the perceptions of African American, European American, and Latino students with LD regarding self-determination during postsecondary transition planning. In addition, their perceptions of the role of parents and teachers in planning post-secondary opportunities were explored. A qualitative approach, using focus groups and narrative analysis, was used to examine the appropriateness of self-determination models for these students.

Although the descriptive phrase "culturally and linguistically diverse" is not typically used to refer to European American people, for the purpose of this study I have included European Americans, as well as African Americans and Latinos, in this group. An essential question that this project has sought to answer is whether racial/ethnic identity impacts self-determination preferences and behaviors. In this study, the European American group of students provides a comparison group, given that existing models are based on dominant culture values. European American students were also included to determine if their behaviors and perceptions are representative of the students included in previous research. It is important to note that members of each of the groups shared low socioeconomic backgrounds. Analysis involved between-group variation, as well as within-group variation, as I compared African American, European American, and Latino students' self-determination styles during transition planning.

The following research questions have guided this study:

1. What are the self-determination behaviors of CLD adolescents with LD?
2. How do CLD students perceive their own role and responsibilities regarding transition planning?
3. How do CLD students perceive the influence of their parents and teachers on the transition planning process?

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

In 1984, Will proposed transition services for students with disabilities in response to concerns about postsecondary employment outcomes for these students. While employment was the initial focus of transition services in special education, Halpern (1985) reframed the concept to include community involvement and independent living. Early efforts to help students with disabilities transition to adult life, however, eluded students with LD because they were thought to have mild disabilities who needed little in the way of transition-related modifications, services, and planning (Dunn, 1996). Follow-up and longitudinal studies conducted in the 1990s revealed that contrary to the belief that students with LD did not need assistance in postsecondary transitions, this group of students was not enjoying successful transition to either postsecondary educational or employment settings (Aune & Friehe, 1996; Sturomski, 1996). The push to include students with LD as active members of their own transition planning team is a current focus in postsecondary transition literature (Blalock & Patton, 1996). Instructing students on becoming self-determined is part of an effort to increase student involvement and honor individual life choices (Wehmeyer, 1995a).

A review of postsecondary transition literature, including a brief overview of the development of transition theory and recommended practices, is instrumental in

understanding the emphasis on self-determination. Both theory and practice in this field have evolved from their origins in vocational education, and in the past several decades, have developed into a significant area of study in special education. As postsecondary transition needs and target outcomes continue to be expanded and addressed in this body_of literature, scholars have begun to explore the needs and practices of CLD students (Patton, Cronin, & Jairrels, 1997).

Concern for CLD students who are transitioning from high school to adult life deserves attention from a theoretical, as well as practical, perspective. From a theoretical perspective, multicultural special education research reflects the importance of racial/ethnic identity in terms of identification of special needs, conceptualization of disability, and access to special education services. From a practical perspective, the population of the United States is becoming increasingly diverse. By 1990, 380 language categories were identified in the United States (Wolfe, Boone, & Barrera, 1997). American classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse. In 1999, 38% of the U.S. school-aged population was considered to be a member of a minority group, which was 16 percentage points higher than in 1972 (NCES, 1999b). Of these students, 16.5% identified as African American, 16.2% identified as Latino, and 5.5% were categorized as "Other." In many urban areas, CLD students comprise the majority of the study body (Thorp, 1997). Some predict the national percentage of school-age population from

CLD families will reach almost 50% by the first quarter of this century (Wolfe et al., 1997).

From Employment to Self-Determination: Expanding the Scope of Transition Planning

Efforts to encourage transition planning among youth with disabilities have involved both legislative mandates and calls to actions by scholars and policy makers in the field of special education. Numerous pieces of disability-related legislation, including vocational education acts (1976, 1984, 1990, 1994), rehabilitation acts (1973, 1978, 1986, 1992), and special education acts (1975, 1983, 1990, 1997) have stressed the importance of providing transition planning to individuals with disabilities (Patton & Dunn, 1998). While employment has always been a central focus of transition planning initiatives, postsecondary transition planning has been expanded to include other demands of adult living such as community integration and daily living skills.

Transition Foci

Since its inception in 1984, the original transition services model from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) has gone through a series of transformations and expansions. Originally, the OSERS model (Will, 1984) depicted employment as the purpose or outcome of transition services. Halpern (1985), however, broadened the scope of these services by suggesting that community adjustment, which included not only employment, but also "residential environment" and "social and interpersonal networks," was a more comprehensive and appropriate

goal for students with disabilities. Clark and Patton (1997) identified 11 key transition domains including: community participation, daily living, employment, financial management, health, independent living, leisure, postsecondary education, social skills, mobility, and vocational training. Although addressing transition needs in these domains is not mandated by legislation, recommended practices clearly support comprehensive postsecondary transition planning (Patton et al., 1997).

Although legislative requirements of postsecondary transition remain broad, transition services now include coordination of related services, in addition to the statement of transition needs (Patton & Dunn, 1998). The most recent amendments to Public Law 105-17, the Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA, 1997), include these requirements for transition planning (Section 614 (vii) (I) and (II)):

> (I) beginning at the age of 14, and updated annually, a statement of the transition service needs of the child under the applicable components of the child's course of study (such as participation in advanced-placement courses or a vocational education program);
>
> (II) beginning at age 16 (or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP Team), a statement of need transition services for the child, including, when appropriate, a statement of the interagency responsibilities or any needed linkages

Self-Determination Initiatives

The 1997 Amendments to IDEA reinforced several best practices: transition planning needs to begin before students are ready to exit high school, the planning process needs to consider outside agency participation, and the entire process needs to

be consumer-driven. Students needed to have plans in place by age 14. Additionally, ITPs should include both instructional and linkage goals (Clark & Patton, 1997). Instructional goals consist of skills and knowledge students need to acquire. Linkage goals incorporate connections between students and transition support services. Explicit statements of linkage goals are designed to promote interagency agreement, which had been identified as an obstacle to successful transition (Benz & Halpern, 1987; Stodden & Boone, 1987). Finally, students must be considered key players in ITP generation and implementation.

Student participation in the transition process has been touted as important by educators and policy makers. This is evidenced, for example, in the position paper of the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (1996). Requiring students to participate in ITP meetings requires educators to develop students' ability to articulate their goals and needs, act on them, and assess their own progress. The roles and responsibilities of students in transition planning were expanded and included several components that are key to self-determination: develop knowledge of self and disability, set goals, practice self-advocacy, and utilize self-assessment (NJCLD, 1996). Also in the 1990s, self-determination research began to dominate the postsecondary transition discussion. OSERS funded numerous initiatives to develop self-determination models (Field, 1996).

Self-Determination in the Postsecondary Transition Process

While research has demonstrated the importance of self-determination during postsecondary transition, CLD students' preferences and practices in this area have not been comprehensively examined. Because the push for self-determination is based on culturally relative values such as normalization and independence, more information about the compatibility of self-determination models with diverse populations is necessary. Studies involving cross-cultural practices and preferences in the area of parent participation in the special education process have revealed that CLD families approach education for students with disabilities in ways that may differ from members of the dominant group. Therefore, information regarding CLD students' self-determination styles and preferences during the postsecondary transition process has the potential to narrow an existing gap in the literature.

The purpose of this study has been to examine the self-determination perceptions and practices of diverse students to better understand the compatibility between current models and this population. A review of the literature in self-determination during postsecondary transition for students with LD, as well as the influence of cultural values on this process, highlights gaps of knowledge about postsecondary transition service provision to CLD families.

One of the most significant developments in the study of postsecondary transition has been the conceptualization, program development, implementation, and

assessment of self-determination. Since the publication of the seminal work of psychologists Deci and Ryan (1985), educational researchers and practitioners have been interested in exploring the concepts of self-determination in relation to disability. In fact, legislators and scholars concerned with special education outcomes have invested much effort, in addition to resources, in developing ways in which people with disabilities can be self-determining.

Rationale for Promoting Self-Determination

The overarching philosophy of special education supports the idea that individuals with disabilities have the right to be self-determining, as is evidenced in person-centered approaches to educational programming. In theory, increasing students' self-determination may increase their success in moving from high school to adult living (Wehmeyer, 1995a). For example, studies have demonstrated a close relationship between self-determination and motivation, which may impact students' decisions to dropout of school (Field, 1996). Also, common components of self-determination (e.g.,, decision-making, choice, goal setting, and self-assessment) correspond to the setting demands of both postsecondary education and employment (Durlak, Rose, & Bursuck, 1994). Furthermore, focusing on students' needs and interests is an integral part of self-determination and career development, on which transition is historically based (Wehmeyer, 1995a).

A person-centered approach. Increasingly, people with disabilities have advocated for more control over their own lives (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). As person-centered services and active student participation became essential underlying values in the special education process, the issue of self-determination became inextricably linked with the transition from school to adulthood (Lehmann, Bassett, & Sands, 1999; Miner & Bates, 1997). Students must exercise choices, and the ability to do so relies on self-determination skills. Legislative efforts such as the 1997 ammendments to IDEA require special educators to encourage student participation and base IEP/ITPs on the interests, strengths, and needs of each student. In addition to IDEA, the reauthorization in 1992 of the Rehabilitation Act, included self-determination as a stated right (Field, 1996).

Dropout rates. Dropout rates for students with LD are disturbingly high. In a review of transition literature, Collet-Klingenberg (1998) reported that between 36% and 56% of students with LD leave high school without a diploma or certificate of completion. According to the 22nd Annual Report to Congress, only 30% of students with LD, ages 17-21, graduated from high school with standard diplomas (OSERS, 2000). Low academic achievement and high rates of retention are considered contributing factors to students' decisions to quit high school (Dunn, 1996). Completion of ITP goals has been identified as one predictor of both graduation with diploma and employability (Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000). Teaching students to

set and pursue goals, an integral part of self-determination, can result in their pursuit of educational opportunities.

Postsecondary education. Students with LD may not prepare for or plan to attend college for a number of reasons (Aune & Friehe, 1996). In a follow-up study conducted by Colley and Jamison (1998), 40% of students with disabilities, the majority of whom had been diagnosed with LD, graduated from high school with a regular diploma. Only half of these students enrolled in postsecondary educational settings. According to the 22nd Annual Report to Congress, in 1996, 18.7% were enrolled in academic postsecondary educational settings and 17.8% in vocational educational settings (OSERS, 2000).

Students with LD typically have academic difficulties that may result in knowledge deficits (Dunn, 1996). In addition to lacking important content information and preparatory coursework, students with LD may have a poor understanding of their own disability and how it may impact subsequent learning experiences (Brinckerhoff, 1996). Once students with LD make the decision to continue education after high school, they need to select an appropriate program that provides necessary supports. Yet, they may not utilize accommodations and supports (Colley & Jamison, 1998). Self-determination programs may assist students in planning for support in postsecondary educational settings because they include components designed to teach students how to seek necessary accommodations and supports (Durlak et al., 1994).

Postsecondary employment. Although students with LD in the NLTS had the highest employment rate of all disability category groups, limitations on further education created a ceiling beyond which students were unlikely to move (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). Schloss et al. (1994) point out that problem solving and decision-making are necessary skills in order to maintain employment, and are often cited by employers as reasons for dismissal of personnel. Skills and knowledge included in self-determination models and curricula address these requisite skills. Realistic goal setting for future employment is important for students with LD because they may base career decisions on incomplete information about their own skills and disabilities (Rojewski, 1996). Many self-determination models focus on knowledge of self (Field, 1996).

Defining Characteristics of Self-Determination

Broadly defined, self-determination is a person's freedom to make decisions independently (Schloss et al., 1994). Making choices about work, education, and independent living are examples of self-determining behaviors. Wehmeyer (1995a) points out that self-determination is linked to the civil/human rights of people with disabilities, as this population must be free to make the same choices as people without disabilities. Of course, the concept is complex because embedded in this freedom, are acquired skills and attitudes that people use when exercising this freedom (Field, 1996). A closer examination of self-determination as a set of requisite skills, as an outcome of

postsecondary transition models, and as a method for transition instruction, can explain the defining features of this concept.

A set of requisite skills. Self-determination has been defined extensively throughout special education literature (Field, 1996; Schloss et al., 1994; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). Common threads across definitions include choice, decision-making, and goal attainment. Wehmeyer (1995a) has focused on "causal agency," a term which means people can make choices and decisions without excessive pressure or influence from others that result in events occurring in their lives. A key focus here is autonomy and control.

In addition to autonomy and choice/decision making, the idea that students with LD must act on their decisions and learn from the resulting outcomes and experiences is addressed in each definition of self-determination. Evaluating self, acting on self-evaluation, and self-regulating are central components of models developed by Field and Hoffman (1994) and Martin and Huber-Marshall (1995). Self-advocacy is also frequently mentioned during discussions on self-determination, yet self-advocacy is distinct from self-determination in that the former is a sub-skill of the latter (Field, 1996). In other words, self-determination requires one to advocate for one's own needs.

An outcome of postsecondary transitional models. Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) argue that for students in special education, self-determination needs to be considered as an educational outcome that has the potential to help students access

positive adult outcomes as they transition to life after high school. Decision making skills, goal setting, self-regulation, and other components of self-determination are important for many adult living responsibilities. Therefore, students need direct instruction in each of the requite skills but the ultimate goal of transition education is to enable them to both apply and generalize self-determination in a variety of contexts, including education, employment, and daily living.

A method for transition instruction. During the early 1990s a variety of self-determination model programs were developed (Field, 1996). Many were developed as curricula that promoted student participation in the special education process. Programs such as *ChoiceMaker* (Martin & Huber-Marshall, 1995) *Steps to Self-Determination* (Field & Hoffman, 1996), and *Whose Future is it Anyway?* (Wehmeyer, 1995b) are designed to increase student knowledge of life skills and self-awareness, as well as increase their participation during IEP and ITP meetings. Promoting self-determination by including students in transition planning activities is commonly used as an instructional tool to increase students' knowledge and application of postsecondary strategies and skills.

Extending this student capacity to a broader context, as suggested by Wehmeyer, Palmer, Agran, Mithaug, & Martin (2000), the learning experience is no longer teacher directed; rather, students learn to make decisions regarding their individualized education programs as well as the delivery of instruction. The

relationship that develops between teacher and student, via self-determination instruction, is that of partner (Field, 1996). Rather than acting as an authority in the classroom, teachers will act as co-learners (Wehmeyer, 1995b). For students, as well as teachers, adjusting to a new role with new responsibilities will likely be necessary because special education instructional methodologies have customarily promoted dependence and limited choices (Wehmeyer, 1995a). Traditionally, special educators have seen themselves as caretakers, providing students with few opportunities for choice, which has contributed to learned helplessness (Bassett & Lehmann, 2002). Teachers who use self-determination models take on a more facilitative role while students assume more control over their lives (Wehmeyer, 1995b).

Gaps in the Self-Determination Postsecondary Transition Literature

Despite the overwhelming support by people with disabilities, legislators, scholars, and educators, there are gaps in our knowledge about self-determination (Field, 1996). Although, self-determination fits into the theoretical framework for postsecondary transition outlined here, empirical support of the implementation of best transition practices or mandated student participation is sparse (Collet-Klingenberg, 1998; Lehmann et al., 1999). Also, the original focus by researchers on the development of self-determination was noncategorical (Field, 1996); therefore, key information regarding students with LD and self-determination is missing. Best practices and model programs commonly address instructional strategies for self-

determination, yet implementation of postsecondary transition services varies according to the extent to which professionals value the process and the availability of resources (Hasazi, Furney, & DeStefano, 1999).

Another substantial gap in self-determination literature is the efficacy of self-determination models and methods for CLD students and their families. The premise that self-determination is a crucial postsecondary skill has been determined by the measurement of outcomes such as employability, enrollment in postsecondary education programs, and residential independence. While the ability to earn a living and the opportunity to pursue higher education do impact transition to adulthood, the extent to which people pursue both residential and financial independence may be determined by cultural values regarding the family unit and interdependence among its members. Including diverse groups of participants can augment empirical evidence regarding the significance of self-determination and adult success. Current research leaves important questions unanswered: Is self-determination, measured largely by postsecondary residential and financial independence, an important benchmark of transition success for all students? How do CLD students and families respond to self-determination models of instruction? Do existing models of self-determination incorporate knowledge and theory generated by cultural studies of parent-child interaction, child development, and cross-cultural communication styles?

Self-determination as a benchmark. Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) measured students' self-determination prior to graduation and again following graduation. They concluded that participants in the "high self-determination group," as defined by scores on the ARC's Self-Determination Scale and other assessment tools, were more likely to be employed and receive higher wages than were participants in the "low self-determination group," one year after high school. They found no significant differences between the two groups, however, in enrollment in post-secondary education or residential independence. Parent reports of student outcomes did reflect that "high self-determination" students expressed a desire to live on their own more frequently than did students with "low self-determination". While Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) do acknowledge that using parent reports of students' postsecondary outcomes may be problematic, they do not address issues regarding cultural values and identities of the students and parents they assessed and surveyed. Conclusions regarding the importance of self-determination and postsecondary transition for CLD students with LD cannot be made with confidence.

CLD student and family responses to self-determination models. Infrequent reporting of the ethnicity of the student and family participants has created another gap in our understanding of self-determination. In 1995, *Intervention in School and Clinic* published a special issue on self-determination models and presented programs such as *ChoiceMaker* (Martin & Huber-Marshall, 1995) and *The Road to Personal Freedom*

(Ludi & Martin, 1995). Program reviews, however, generally omitted specific descriptions of the cultural and linguistic identities of the participants. This lack of information creates serious questions as to the applicability of these models for groups of people who may maintain a range of values regarding the concept of self-determination that differ from European American students.

Even when reported, data may not be analyzed by the race/ethnicity and/or the cultural identity of participants. For example, Wehmeyer and Lawrence (1995) assessed students' self-determination and implemented a model program in which students with disabilities, whose ethnicities were reported, received training in self-determination skills including self-awareness, goal setting, and ITP meeting leadership. Roughly one half of the participants in this study were students who had been identified as students with LD. Once the training was complete, students were reassessed on a wide range of self-determination measures to determine the program impact. While they concluded that the program did impact students' levels of self-determination, though not in a statistically significant way, we do not know if or how this impact varied according to ethnicity. Perhaps variation by ethnicity of participants did not occur. Yet elements of the model, such as assertive communication styles, make the question pertinent because communication styles vary according to cultural identity. Furthermore, questions regarding the cultural values of the parents and the students, both presumably involved

in transition planning, need to be examined before determining the appropriateness of such an intervention. Obtaining reactions of CLD participants would also be invaluable.

Field and Hoffman (1994) developed a self-determination model that includes two major domains: individual and environmental. *Steps to Self-Determination* is a curriculum that was built upon their original self-determination model (Field & Hoffman, 1996). While their model is intended to address transition planning needs, components of the model facilitate decision-making, goal-setting, and self-determination central to people's lives from childhood to adulthood. Five components: *Know Yourself*, *Value Yourself*, *Plan*, *Act*, and *Experience Outcomes and Learn*, comprise the model, which reflects the interaction between a person's knowledge, skills, and values (internal factors) and the environmental opportunities for choice (external factors) (Field & Hoffman, 1996). Specific knowledge includes awareness of strengths and weaknesses, awareness of options, identification of roles and responsibilities, and the prioritization of goals. Skills include the ability to set goals, communicate needs, and self-assess. Values encompass self-recognition, respect for responsibilities, and persistence. External factors, or factors that influence students' achievement of self-determination, include exposure to self-determined role models and curriculum, opportunities for choice and risk-taking accompanied by support and guidance, and adults' responses to students' self-determination experiences (Field, Hoffman, & Spezia, 1998).

In order to address the external factors, model implementation includes involving family members (Field & Hoffman, 1994). Students are encouraged to request the support of important adults in their lives who respond to the students' progress in the program. For example, adult invitees partake in activities that increase their support of students' self-determination efforts. More specific instructions for the involvement of adults in *Steps to Self-Determination* are not included, as the manual addresses course curriculum for student classes. The model was field tested in one urban, racially diverse high school and one suburban, predominantly European American high school (Field & Hoffman, 1994). Comparing the effects of the program using a treatment and control group, the researchers judged the model's efficacy by administering two standardized self-determination measurements and concluded that it was an effective way to help students gain self-determination skills. As has been the case with other implementation studies, efficacy information was not reported by ethnicity.

Culturally Relevant Knowledge and Theory and Self-Determination

Self-determination requires students to become actively involved in the ITP planning process, yet we do not know how comfortable students or families are with this (Miner & Bates, 1997). This may be particularly true for CLD families who may approach the special education process differently than teachers expect (Bailey et al., 1999). For example, teachers often maintain that CLD parents who do not attend

meetings and correspond in writing are not vested in the educational needs of their children (Voltz, 1994). Researchers have found, however, that passivity and compliance (via signatures on special education papers) are signs of resignation and feelings of powerlessness in response to frustration with the special education system rather than neglectful attitudes toward children's needs (Harry, 1992).

Researchers studying self-determination point out that actively involving students in IEP/ITP meetings is appropriate for many reasons (Blalock & Patton, 1996; Wehmeyer, 1995a). While the argument in favor of such involvement is strong, however, scholars cannot ignore the fact that appropriateness of self-determination for adolescents may differ among CLD groups. Models of self-determination during postsecondary transition are one part of the special education process, which itself is driven by underlying cultural values, and fundamentally engage issues of cultural identity. Incorporating research on dominant-culture perspectives in special education into the discussion regarding self-determination and postsecondary transition for CLD students with LD is crucial.

Dominant Values Embedded in Special Education Philosophy

Special education is a field driven by the philosophical underpinnings of dominant American values, which are embedded in legislation that guides current practice. Emphasis on self-determination throughout the special education process, in particular postsecondary transition, is a manifestation of cultural values. Embedded

values include autonomy and independence, equity, and normalization (Harry, 1992; Harry et al., 1999). The language of both IDEA 1997 and the Rehabilitation Act of 1992, addressing self-determination, explicitly focuses on these key values. While no one would likely argue that these values have not substantially increased the quality of life for individuals with disabilities, acknowledging that not all groups of people prioritize them in the same way is important.

Autonomy and independence. The philosophy that people have the right to be autonomous is a driving force in special education and the promotion of self-determination. Although the ability to think and act independently is one demand of adulthood, the independence with which people function is intertwined with their cultural identities. Some societies value collective approaches to living while others value individualistic approaches (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). Within all societies, values that guide social interaction, communication, and survival are points on a continuum of individuality and collectivity. Individualism and self-reliance are distinct cultural values relative to self-determination that may or may not be shared by all members of our diverse society (Harry et al., 1999).

Freedom of choice is another significant underlying value behind the framework of the special education system (Harry, 1992). Self-determination models of transition expect the student to make choices and accept the role and responsibilities of an informed consumer (Wehmeyer, 1995a). The right to choose is important in a society

where autonomy and independence are thought to provide each person with a chance for upward mobility, but some cultures do not place such an emphasis on choice (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999). Diverse student and parent input may involve soliciting the opinions of parents and/or extended members of the family (Voltz, 1994). In many less individualistic cultures, decisions and choices are customarily made within a group after consultation with elders.

In the dominant American culture, value judgments about orientation toward independence are positive and considered ideal. Interdependence, however, is considered less than desirable (Greenfield, 1994). In particular, independence is demonstrated by autonomy, and developmentally, autonomous behavior is expected at certain life stages. Self-determination during the postsecondary transition process in special education is a clear example of this. Throughout the literature self-determination is stated as an ideal, something to be taught to both children and their parents, something that will improve the lives of people with disabilities (Field, 1996; Ludi & Martin, 1995; Wehmeyer, 1995a). Yet, the standards regarding when, and to what extent, people are self-determining have originated from people in the dominant, independence-valuing culture. We do not know when and to what extent CLD people from other points on the continuum of interdependence/independence, agree with these priorities.

Equity. Postsecondary transition and self-determination are additionally couched in the belief that all people are valuable members of society and maintain equal status (Harry et al., 1999). For many people who identify with cultural and ethnic groups other than the dominant group, hierarchical relationships take precedence over equity (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). Thus, during IEP/ITP meetings students and their parents may vary in their level of comfort in accepting a central planning role. This will likely influence the scope of their participation, as well as their expectations of one another. Learning how to maneuver the system and understanding disability and appropriate accommodations is complex and requires time and practice (Durlak et al., 1994). Implementation of self-determination and successful student leadership of ITP conferences requires the support of parents. If self-determination models conflict with parents' perceptions of appropriate behavior of children and the importance of community status, this may not occur.

Participation in special education assumes that IEP/ITP team members, in particular family members and students, will be able to function as advocates or consumers in a system that is based on the medical and legal systems (Harry, 1992). If parents come from cultures that value hierarchical structure, the idea that they or their children have the right and responsibility to advocate their needs to high-status professionals may be foreign to them (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999). Parents may be uncomfortable allowing their child to play a leadership role among adults and

professionals (Miner & Bates, 1997). Equal status of IEP/ITP team members means that the input of each is a significant driving force behind final decisions. Yet, parents may not agree with putting their children in positions of self-determination and self-advocacy.

Although Field (1996) suggests that when parents step into the role of advocate, they may thwart their children's efforts of self-determination, conflict between the family and the school regarding placement and service provisions can have serious educational implications. For example, parents or the student may want specific accommodations or a particular placement while school personnel question the appropriateness of such a provision. How will students advocate for themselves when faced with professionals who view the situation differently?

Normalization. Emphasis on postsecondary transition underscores its significance as a milestone in American educational culture. A commonly accepted belief is that the parent/child relationship is redefined during the change from adolescence to adulthood (Field, 1996). Expecting all adolescents to accept and practice self-determination with uniformity, such as assuming leadership of an IEP/ITP meeting, is asking all families to adopt the cultural values of the dominant group (Deyhle & LeCompte, 1999).

In the dominant American culture, adolescents are expected to accept responsibility, establish self-control, and respond to an internal locus of control

(Michaels, 1994). Questioning authority, establishing close peer relationships, and desiring independence are also associated with adolescent development (Wehmeyer, 1995a). Yet, developmental milestones are norm-referenced rather than absolute (Greenfield, 1994). Culturally and linguistically diverse parents may have different behavioral expectations of their teenagers than do members of the dominant group. The way that one individual or group moves from one developmental stage to the next, which is influenced by a variety of factors including culture, should not be used as a guide, timetable or model for another group of people (Gay, 1999).

From within a culturally based framework, various parameters of adolescence are socially constructed phenomena (Deyhle & LeCompte, 1999). Socially constructed ideas about adolescence influence school programs, such as postsecondary transition, which may or may not meet the needs of diverse constituencies. Deyhle and LeCompte's (1999) study comparing Navajo and Anglo beliefs about adolescence and parenting is particularly appropriate to illustrate this point. They found that members of the two groups had distinct beliefs regarding typical adolescent development. For example, Anglos and Navajos differed on the age at which children were ready to be treated as adults and were capable of assuming responsibility. Navajo parents valued noninterference and, while they offered their children guidance, they respected their independence. Non-Navajo teachers were dismayed and judgmental when Navajo parents employed parenting strategies unique to their group. Students and families

experienced additional strife resulting from disparity between the Navajo focus on the interdependent relationship of community members and the Anglo-preferred focus on the individual (Deyhle & LeCompte, 1999). Members outside the dominant group are at risk for failing to follow rules and norms to which they do not ascribe.

Elements of transition planning and self-determination, such as moving into an independent residence or leaving home to pursue postsecondary educational opportunities are generally accepted success norms by which people with disabilities are judged. For CLD families, financial and residential independence may not be a priority. Parents' expectations on these matters may vary (Harry et al., 1999). Adapting to the success norms included in self-determination models may be challenging for students in ITP meetings, particularly if they come from a home in which children are judged by alternative norms. Field and Hoffman's (1994) model for self-determination illustrates the significance of external factors such as the home environment and parental encouragement of their child's self-determination, yet increased attention to the family culture is warranted. Students may observe conflict between their parents' values and beliefs and those upheld by the school, making it difficult for them to participate in the mode chosen by the school. If we use residential independence as a marker of success, we make an assumption that cultural values of the European American, middle class are universally desirable.

For people with an orientation toward interdependence, living and raising children in the independence-oriented U.S. society can lead to conflict between CLD parents and their children (Greenfield, 1994). The interdependence-associated values, traditions, and beliefs heavily influence parents' participation in the society at large. For their children, however, opportunities to adapt to the school culture may be more numerous, thus introducing independent-associated values. In the educational arena, conflicts between these two orientations abound and the result is a generational constraint between value systems (Greenfield, 1994). This conflict may become keenly apparent during adolescence, while both parents and children are trying to define the child's appropriate self-determination script.

Ludi and Martin (1995) acknowledge that self-determination may have differing meanings based on cultural identity and type of disability. They conclude, however, "… culture itself does not alter the meaning of self-determination, but it is likely to change some of the characteristics developed and the manner in which that development takes place" (p.165). Understanding that all people do not share identical values is essential if we are going to truly honor the spirit of IDEA by including parent and student participation throughout the transition from school to postsecondary life. The complexity with which cultural mores and traditions drive life transitions is significant. The ultimate goal of transition planning is for students to experience personal fulfillment as adults living in the community of their choosing (Blalock &

Patton, 1996). While we all experience vertical transitions through the aging process (e.g.,, physical maturation during puberty), horizontal transitions, such as marriage, are not universal.

Student Practices of Self-Determination in ITP Meetings

The development of self-determination as a vehicle for postsecondary transition skills has resulted in an expectation that students should maintain a participatory role in IEP/ITP meetings (Durlak et al., 1994; Wehmeyer & Lawrence, 1995). This coincides with legislative mandates that require the ITP to be based on students' needs, preferences, and interests. In so doing, students have opportunities to practice self-determination skills such as self-knowledge, decision-making, and goal setting. The overall outcome of these types of experiences is increased independence (Brinckerhoff, 1996). How well do these objectives coincide with the values and beliefs of CLD families?

Families base educational decisions on cultural values, traditions, and expectations (Blalock & Patton, 1996). Student-led IEP/ITP conferences may not be compatible with the expectations of parents and other family members. While results of IEP leadership (e.g.,, communication skills, knowledge of own strengths and needs, self-advocacy) are important transitional skills (Wehmeyer & Lawrence, 1995), consideration must be given to the context within which the student is expected to perform. Because self-determination relies on both internal and external characteristics

(Field & Hoffman, 1994), support from family and community members is necessary to create opportunities for decision-making practice (Ludi & Martin, 1995). While self-determination curricula such as the one developed by Field and Hoffman (1994) include a component for parent participation, parents may or may not be comfortable with the extent to which researchers and educators are suggesting students become self-determined. Also, they may be uncomfortable with the way in which they are asked to become involved.

In order for students to articulate goals, they must first understand their strengths and needs. Whether a student with LD transitions to employment or educational opportunities, disability awareness can be invaluable. Knowledge about self is incorporated in many self-determination models and curricula (Field, 1996). Yet, research has provided evidence that different groups of people understand and accept disability differently (García et al., 2000; Skinner et al., 1999). Students' willingness and proficiency articulating their experiences with disability may be a challenge. The congruency between the families' perceptions of disability and the schools' perceptions will likely impact students.

While self-determination is not limited to the above practices, each example demonstrates how culturally embedded values can impact student and family responses to practices promoted by members of the school community who may be unfamiliar with the cultural traditions and values of the families they serve. Family and student-

centered approaches to postsecondary transition are mandated by legislation and supported by research. Yet, neither planning for postsecondary options nor involving parents and students in the process is formulaic. Teachers and researchers need to recognize possible incongruity between recommended practices and CLD families and work with the families and students to rectify the situation. Special education literature has been informative in defining self-determination as the freedom to choose and make decisions. Literature that addresses the cultural relevancy of student and family participation in the educational process can inform our understanding of the appropriateness of self-determination models for the CLD population. Clearly, separating self-determination and cultural values is difficult, if not impossible.

The Impact of Race, Ethnicity, and Class on the Practice of Self-Determination

If self-determination, as it is conceived in special education literature, is situated in the cultural values and ideas of individualism and consumerism, does it follow that people who are not members of dominant American society will differ in their perceptions or behaviors regarding their practice, or their children's practice, as it pertains to self-determination and to postsecondary transitions for students with LD? A review of emerging themes in current literature that examines the impact of race, ethnicity, and class on the participation of CLD youth and their families in the American educational system addresses this question. Included in this review are studies involving African American and Latino youth living in impoverished urban

areas, since those youth, together with economically disadvantaged European American students, are the primary focus of this study. Additionally, themes that have strong ties to the demands and opportunities of self-determination during postsecondary transition will be explored.

Supporting the hypothesis that self-determination perceptions and behaviors of CLD students might differ from the European American youth featured in previous research are numerous studies that show that students' cultural identities, of which race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status are components, impact their approach to education (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). Furthermore, these same studies reveal a lack of understanding on the part of school administrators and teachers, most of whom identify as members of the dominant group, regarding the educational needs of CLD students and their families. Youth from CLD families utilize a variety of strategies to cope with schooling practices that are, at best, obscured by the assumption of dominant group educators that educational practices are universal and need not be explicitly discussed or individualized, or at worst, incompatible with CLD youth's home cultures causing educational failure. For example, special education policy mandates active participation from parents in the form of decision-maker and advocate. Research has demonstrated that fulfillment of these roles correlates with superior delivery of special education services. Yet, CLD parents may be unaware of this role, or unprepared to fulfill it. Ideally, the system should be able to accommodate

all students regardless of the strength with which parents fulfill these roles. Consistent topics of discussion regarding CLD students have been school success and failure, parent participation in the U.S. education system, familial relationships, and student membership in the school community.

School Success and Failure

Academic achievement is measured by a variety of indicators including achievement tests, high school completion rates, SAT scores, and postsecondary education enrollment, to name only a few. Descriptions of student achievement in the U.S. have typically involved discussion of achievement gaps between students of color, frequently African American students, and European American students. Poverty is a variable that continually surfaces as an explanation for differences in achievement among different racial/ethnic groups. Achievement gaps among differing racial/ethnic groups, however, cannot be attributed to socioeconomic status, or any other single variable, alone (Lee, 2002). In fact, a more productive analysis of student achievement would include a far more complex consideration for a number of variables generated by numerous data sources that influence achievement gaps both simultaneously and fluidly across time and groups affiliation (Lee, 2002).

Therefore, while the documentation of the struggles of economically disadvantaged, urban youth of color to attain academic achievement and educational goals is abundant, much of it is perhaps insufficient in its ability to explain existing

gaps. A variety of perspectives can be found in educational research. Some perspectives are based on deficit models and focus on the student and/or his home community as the problem, while other studies eschew this approach and attempt to study systemic and contextual variables that place CLD children at risk for failure. Still other studies represent more medial points on the continuum of deficit thinking in the conceptualization of academic and social success or failure of CLD students, including those with disabilities. While it is true that deficit-oriented explanations of CLD students are being challenged (see for example, Valencia, 1997) this perspective has yet to be eliminated from educational research. Unfortunately, studies that employ methods that rely on the dichotomization of home and school characteristics, and thus omit analysis of the interplay of those variables and others, provide an overly simple view of achievement gaps among racial/ethnic groups (Lee, 2002).

Evidence of deficit models. The examination of CLD student disproportionality in special education programs (National Research Council, 2002) is a good example of an analysis designed to examine the success and failure of CLD students in special education, but one that continues to utilize the subtle language of deficit thinking, many instances of which are contained in the executive summary. Referring to CLD students as "minority" students throughout the report, which as Hilliard (1980) has stated, is a term that is often inaccurate from one locale to the next, and may imply powerlessness and disregard.

Other deficit-oriented language includes referring to CLD students as minority children who come from "disadvantaged backgrounds" (National Research Council, 2002, p. 4) without describing the specific characteristics of disadvantage. This language leaves the reader wondering if the authors are using the term in reference to economic disadvantage, or rather if the term is loaded with dominant-group definitions of disadvantage that might include anything from individual characteristics (e.g.,, intelligence quotients in Herrnstein & Murray, 1994) to child-rearing practices (e.g.,, parent-child talk in (Heath, 1983/1999). Further examples of deficit language include referents to the need for teachers of CLD students to be skillful at minimizing "chaos…[and] put students on the path to academic success" (p. 5). Do CLD students come to the classroom with a propensity for chaos? If so, this argument is not supported elsewhere in this document.

Examples of deficit model thinking in this important and widely quoted report on CLD student success and failure exceed semantics. Consider, for example, that although the study acknowledges the myriad of ways in which systemic inequity in schools and personnel quality in settings where CLD students comprise majority populations exists, as well as documented teacher bias, the authors fail to conclude that these factors categorically contribute to the overrepresentation of CLD students in disability categories such as LD by saying, "But whether bias is maintained when teachers have direct contact with children in the classroom, is not clear" (National

Research Council, 2002, p. 5). Statements and conclusions such as these seem to skirt issues that directly impact success and failure of CLD students. The authors do explore teacher and school setting characteristics that contribute to the phenomenon of overrepresentation (see Chapter 5, National Research Council, 2002) but they fail to make this the focus of the report, and continue to revert to student characteristics to explain the failure of CLD students.

Such an examination of this report is pertinent to the discussion about the impact of CLD student success/failure on self-determination expectations of these students precisely because such practices demand equity between students and their families and special education personnel. This equity is difficult to establish if CLD students have been identified as having disabilities based on deficit views of students and/or their families, a fact the report itself documents: "…minority students may perform poorly or choose not to participate in academic endeavors in which they run the risk of confirming the stereotype that they are intellectually inferior" (National Research Council, 2002, p. 181). Furthermore, histories of academic failure, which many students in special education have, impact students' ability to set future goals and to strive toward realizing them.

The significance of deficit perspectives, particularly in the study of overrepresentation of CLD youth in special education can be directly linked to the discourse regarding CLD educational success and failure. If youth outside the dominant

group are being incorrectly identified as having disabilities, and if disability labels do not increase students' chances for academic success via specialized educational programs, CLD students whose educational livelihoods are entrusted into the care of special education may be placed in jeopardy of school failure. School failure, of course, has an impact on transitions into adulthood, as well as self-determination during this transition period.

Alternatives to deficit models. Studies from a different perspective, gaining more attention of late, examine the interplay of contextual variables such as poverty, often a factor in urban educational settings, and student/teacher characteristics such as race, that manifests in disproportionately high educational failure rates for diverse students when compared with European American students of middle- to upper-socioeconomic status (Romo & Falbo, 1996; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). While researchers from both perspectives want to know why academic achievement, dropout rates, enrollment in postsecondary settings, and postsecondary employment rates for students of color differ from those experienced by European American youth, non-deficit models of inquiry also typically include the study of success and resiliency (Trueba, 1999). Reframing the educational crisis for CLD youth living in poverty, for the purpose of expelling deficit models and adopting proactive understanding, necessitates examination of the larger, contextual backdrop in which poor, urban youth are situated.

In Valenzuela's study (1999) of U.S.-Mexican youth living in Houston, Texas, generational status, relationships among peers, and immigration issues were all variables in the educational experiences of participants. Interviews of teachers and administrators revealed that educators often make assumptions about the academic achievement and postsecondary options available to students based on how well students assimilate to their values and ideas regarding the purpose and potential benefits of education (Valenzuela, 1999). Furthermore, these assumptions, which are informed by dominant views of race and class that reflect hegemonic beliefs in the superiority of European American educational, relational, and economic values, often inhibit CLD students' understanding of self, futures planning, and goal attainment, all of which are components of self-determination.

Like Valenzuela (1999), Stanton-Salazar (2001) explored the concepts of social capital and social integration, for poor CLD youth as they relate to the educational attainment of U.S.-Mexican youth living in California. Limited resources available to the youth in Stanton-Salazar's (2001) study directly impacted their ability to maximize their public school experience. Social capital, or networks of people and connections that provide support such as advice about school, emotional counsel, community involvement, links to community resources, and references to postsecondary education and career opportunities, may escape the grasp of CLD groups living in poverty who

expend the majority of their energy on survival and whose connections do not extend across boundaries of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

Decisions to drop out, attainment of academic success, and engagement in educational activities in Valenzuela's study (1999) were impacted by the availability of resources that bolstered the funds of knowledge with which they entered the U.S. public school system. These resources are diminished by a system that implicitly and explicitly devalues students' cultural identities. One way that this occurs is through the consistent denial of the existence of differences between the dominant U.S. culture and the cultures of CLD groups. This is essentially what the current special education model for self-determination does by de-emphasizing environmental or contextual factors and by failing to address unique needs of CLD youth with LD. As Valenzuela's (1999) work demonstrates, great variability among CLD youth, even those considered members of the same ethnic group (e.g.,, Mexican-origin youth) exists in their reaction to, and involvement in, the U.S. educational system. For CLD students with LD who do approach self-determination and postsecondary transition differently than their European American counterparts, educational researchers and practitioners need to adjust their expectations and educational practices accordingly.

In *Manufacturing Hope and Despair,* Stanton-Salazar (2001) addresses the educational barriers and facilitators included in the social networks of Mexican-origin youth in poverty. Although some students do break rules, become truant, or drop out

altogether, many CLD students remain invested in the educational process while the rewards of academic gain and social connections with teachers may not come to fruition. Whether CLD students with LD experience disconnections because they live in a racist, classist society, or whether they experience disconnections because they have disabilities in an ablist society, the discord they experience can result in despair and withdrawal from the educational process. Certainly repeated experiences of trying but failing might taint one's understanding of personal strengths and weaknesses, as well as shake a one's resolve in goal setting and attainment.

Parent Participation in the U.S. Educational System

One external factor in the Field and Hoffman (1994) model of self-determination is parent participation during postsecondary transition. Special education literature addressing self-determination, the relationships between parent and child, and the impact of cultural identity on parenting is limited to discussions regarding parent training in self-determination models (Field & Hoffman, 1994). Education literature and research regarding CLD parent participation in the U.S. educational system has addressed the idea that differences do exist and that these differences impact familial approaches to education.

Much has been written about the familial relationships and characteristics of U.S. Latino families; however, stereotyping and over-generalizing members of this group have occurred. Trueba (1999) points out that the U.S. Latino community is

highly diversified yet members share common experiences of resiliency in the face of socioeconomic challenges and cultural isolation. Studies of parent participation in the U.S. general and special education systems provide evidence of the ways in which these challenges have impacted family/parent participation, as well as the relationships between parents and children (Hayes, 1992; Sanchez, 1996). Essentially, these studies reiterate points made by Harry (1992) and presented early in this literature review. The point here is that if parent-school relationships are tentative or conflict-ridden, parents might be less willing to provide opportunities for self-determination to their children if the children are working with people they do not trust.

While parent advocacy is associated with quality educational opportunities, such parental involvement is notably reduced in high-poverty school settings (National Research Council, 2002). Culturally and linguistically diverse parents may have difficulty accepting the role of advocate, not because they do not care about the educational futures, but because this role is heavily laden with cultural assumptions that can result in cross-cultural discord (Harry, 1992; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999). Reasons for reduced or atypical parent involvement on behalf of CLD parents include special education legislative demands that are incompatible with CLD parents' prior experiences, inexplicit expectations on the part of special education personnel, and incongruent or competing values and priorities among special educators and CLD

parents (Harry, 1992, 1999; Kalyanpur & Harry , 1999; Ortiz, Mendez-Perez, & Garcia, 2000).

Some of these same points, as well as additional factors, are reinforced in the general education literature regarding CLD parent participation (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Romo & Falbo, 1996). Diverse parents have been described as maintaining negative feelings, such as anxiety or suspicion, regarding school personnel (Voltz, 1994). When disconnect between CLD parents and school personnel does occur, feelings of discomfort and mistrust may occur. Although this does not describe all interactions between all CLD families and all school personnel, or all interactions all of the time, communication and collaboration breakdowns are common enough phenomena that a plethora of such examples exists in educational literature.

Familial Relationships

Parent-child relationships are culturally bound (Greenfield, 1994). During transitional periods, such the transition to adulthood, parenting practices will be one determining factor of self-determination practices. Examples of the differing way in which CLD students with LD might approach self-determination during transition opportunities can be extrapolated from studies of Latino students' family dynamics that impact opportunities for self-determination in such a way that self-determination can look quite different than the view presented from behind dominant culture lenses. For example, many Latino children have a deep sense of responsibility to and respect

toward the parents and extended family members (Hildebrand, Phenice, Gray, & Hines, 1996) that could influence their definition of what it means to be self-determining. The possible conflict embedded in this study is whether dominant-group researchers' definitions of and strategies to promote self-determination are broad enough to engage all students with LD in this type of transition planning.

Differing parenting styles, irrespective of home-school relationships can also shape the external characteristics for self-determination. For example, Vélez-Ibánez and Greenberg (1992) describe the social contexts of teaching and learning among Mexican-origin parents and children as "thick," a term they define as a set of complex relationships between the learner and their immediate community through which facts and skills are transmitted. In this context, Mexican-origin children learn from their parents in a largely experimental way. Children are expected to learn by asking parents questions and repeated experimentation with the learning task (Vélez-Ibánez & Greenberg, 1992). Yet in transition planning sessions, the child is typically the person being asked about future plans such as attending college, seeking employment, and living arrangements after graduation, all of which are activities they have likely not been able to practice. Moreover, opportunities to practice decision-making and self-advocacy, required during IEP/ITP meetings, may be scarce, making the risks of participation seem especially real to students. In fact, anxiety is typical when a student is out of their comfort zone (Vélez-Ibánez & Greenberg, 1992).

Conversely, the experimental nature of Mexican-origin parents' attempts to transmit knowledge to their children might increase the child's ability to participate in self-determination during postsecondary students. Vélez-Ibánez & Greenberg (1992) point out that through ample practice and feedback from parents these children develop self-evaluation skills, which is one of the internal characteristics of becoming self-determining.

In many African American families, parents and elders communicate authority in ways that differ from European American, middle-class teachers (Delpit, 1995). For example, African American parents may use direct statements to communicate behavioral expectations while European Americans may use rhetorical questioning. If, as Delpit (1995) states, "Black children expect an authority figure to act with authority" (p.35), then students may be uncomfortable when placed in self-determining roles during postsecondary transition planning meetings where figures they associate with authority (e.g.,, teachers and parents) are gathered to discuss school-related topics. Furthermore, they may not have strategies to balance the demands of school (setting own future goals, assessing own progress), and the demands of home (deferring to authority figures).

Information gleaned from studies of CLD families in the educational system is useful, but racial/ethnic identity is but one variable. For students living in poverty, as well as CLD students who experience racism, these deleterious social contexts can

affect familial relationships. Parents may be subjected to overwork, unemployment, or insufficient wages, all of which have the potential to impact family dynamics. Children can be forced to accept responsibilities that are time consuming and overwhelming (Delpit, 1995), or they can be forced to function independently while their parents struggle with securing basic needs. Strategies for building social capital within CLD families and communities, however, do exist. For example, half of the teens in Stanton-Salazar's study (2001) identified ways in which familial resources helped them with questions regarding their participation in school programs and their decisions regarding postsecondary goals. Although these relationships are valuable to CLD students, the author points out that if these networks do not extend outside of one's immediate community, their potential is limited because immediate and distant kin often share the same struggles of poverty and racism as do CLD students themselves.

Student Membership in the School Community

Relationships between teachers and students have the potential to either help or hinder school success. For CLD students, becoming a member of the school community and participating in positive teacher-student relationships may present challenges that stem directly from the fact that teachers have not typically experienced life outside of the dominant group (Tatum, 1997). Multicultural education literature is replete with examples of European American teachers who, with or without overt racist values and beliefs, often misjudge CLD children because they fail to acknowledge both their own

culturally based assumptions about education and behavior and/or because they are unfamiliar with the diversity of culturally-based values and educational strategies employed by diverse groups of children and their families (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001; Tatum, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999). Of course, multicultural education literature contains nonexamples (see Ladson-Billings 1994) and recommendations for the preparation of teachers who employ culturally relevant pedagogy (Sleeter, 2001). Notwithstanding current pushes toward multicultural education, the mismatch between student and teacher continues to exist and productive relationships, whereby CLD students with LD are actively engaged in their own education might be the exception rather than the norm.

As children get older and develop more autonomy and become increasingly influenced by their peer cultures, teachers may not find them as cute or innocent as their elementary-aged counterparts. Teacher-student relationships may become strained during this developmental stage (Thorson, 2003). Certainly, for adolescents who do not fit the dominant culture mold of achievement and success in high school, these relationships can become tense and conflict-ridden (Valenzuela, 1999). Teachers may be unable to provide needed support for CLD youth living in poverty because they remain uncritical of the contextual barriers that impede the success of these students. For example, teachers may become frustrated and exasperated by unsuccessful attempts to captive and motivate students, yet their ability to describe these phenomena results in

a critique of the individual (i.e., attributing problem to student apathy) rather than a critique of the system (i.e., attributing problem to unmet needs to sustain daily life).

Nevertheless, social capital can present itself in the form of relationships with teachers and other school personnel (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). These relationships, much like those between CLD students and their family members, have limited potential, but for a very different reason. Although teachers sometimes exceed the educational demands of teaching by contributing to students' banks of social capital, they often identify as members of the dominant group, whose interest it is to remain dominant, and as such may be unable to critique a system that has been beneficial to them. Stanton-Salazar (2001) poses this question: "How do teachers and counselors manage the tension between their role as agents of social reproduction and their role as co-parents and informal mentors?" (p. 162).

Mismatches between educators' attitudes and actions toward facilitating students' acquisition of social capital necessary for academic success, and CLD students' and families' strategies for building and utilizing social capital, may result in lost opportunities for the development of mutually beneficial relationships between teachers and students. More importantly, CLD students may not be able to attain the educational accomplishments and benefits available to dominant-group youth, for whom such a gap is either less wide. With regard to self-determination, setting goals and attempting to reach them, as well as candidly self-assessing progress, require an

element of trust between the student and his teachers. If a student perceives that teachers view him as a failure or as someone who is "less than" his mainstream peers, he may fear exposing his dreams about the future, or worse, he may accept teachers' low expectations as his own. Furthermore, from the perspective of the teacher, facilitating self-determination requires belief that the student is able to make decisions, set goals, and take action. If teachers so no think their students can do this successfully, they may be reluctant to provide such opportunities.

Connecting Multicultural Education Research and Special Education Transition

Stanton-Salazar's (2001) theory of school success for CLD youth, that the availability of social capital must originate from a variety of sources and that teachers must embrace a critical stance toward the act of providing all students with an equitable education, can be bridged to the special education arena. Clearly, existing models of self-determination are overly simplistic when viewed through the lenses of the dominant, European American middle-class culture. Although a discussion of "social capital" is not addressed by name in special education self-determination literature, relationships between adults and teens that foster connections to resources (e.g., social capital) are acknowledged as a prerequisite to students' practice of self-determination (Field & Hoffman, 2002; Thoma, Nathanson, Baker, & Tamura, 2002). But this discussion stops before it is fruitful for CLD students because the special education model of self-determination relies too heavily on individuals' characteristics and not

enough on the types of support and social capital available to these students. Increased consideration for the environmental component contained in Field and Hoffman's (1994) model, and the interplay between that component and each of the components purported to stem from individual characteristics, must be examined more rigorously. Asking students about their experiences regarding school and futures planning, their self-determining behaviors, what hinders them, and what helps them, is one way to close some of the gaps in the special education self-determination literature.

According to the Field and Hoffman (1994) model of self-determination, in order to become self-determining students must understand their strengths and weaknesses, value their ability to move toward their goals for the future, and be motivated to take action. If, however, students consistently experience failure in school, fulfilling these components of this self-determination model may be particularly challenging. While it is true that the model is designed to address the needs of students with disabilities for whom academic success is sometimes illusive, CLD students with LD have layers of self that include experiences shaped by their membership in racial/ethnic groups outside the dominant culture and those shaped by their membership in a group labeled "disabled." Field (1999) addresses the challenge posed by self-awareness of strengths and weaknesses for students who have LD by suggesting a variety of instructional strategies and curricular modifications. Approaches to self-determination, however, must be expanded to include multicultural concerns. In fact,

Field (1996), briefly addresses this when she identified emerging issues in self-determination practices of students with disabilities: "There is a need to further define the individual and group variables of self-determination and the relative impact of each in a variety of contexts" (p. 82).

Narrowing the Gap in the Literature Base

Although several studies do address self-determination during postsecondary transition planning, gaps in the knowledge base still exist. Studies of the efficacy of self-determination during postsecondary transition planning have generally omitted the perspectives of students, who should be key players on the transition planning team. If we want students to have vested interests in their futures and maintain active roles in goal attainment, understanding how they react to self-determination models is essential. Given the impact of student and family cultural identities on participation in educational programs, data regarding CLD students' and families' preferences for self-determination in transition are also essential.

Four qualitative studies have examined student perceptions of self-determination and postsecondary transition planning issues. These studies, their focus, participants, methods, and summary results are listed in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1
Students' Perceptions of Self-Determination During Transition

Author	Study focus	Participants	Qualitative method	Results
Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff (2000)	Participant perspectives of transition program that required students to use self-determination strategies and actively participate in the transition planning process	45 adolescents with LD, mental retardation (MR), emotional disabilities (ED), & other disabilities; 38 European American, 2 Latino, 3 Asian, 2 Native American; Male n=27 Female n=18	Participants selected using purposive sampling; six focus group interviews were conducted; a moderator and two note takers used an interview guide to interview groups; audio data and field notes were analyzed.	Participants viewed the transition program favorably and specifically mentioned the benefits of goal setting and personal choice. Students' levels of self-confidence appeared to be positively impacted.
Lehmann, Bassett, & Sands (1999)	Student participation in transition planning activities	12 high school students; 7 European American and 5 Latino; Male n=8 Female n=4	Participants selected using purposive sampling, interview and observation data were collected and organized according to theme.	Students were reluctant to share their feelings, deferred to their parents, and appeared uninvolved in transition planning.

Author	Study focus	Participants	Qualitative method	Results
Morningstar, Turnbull, & Turnbull (1996)	Student perceptions of family involvement in transition planning	40 adolescents with LD, behavioral disorders (BD), & mild mental retardation (MMR); 35 European American, 4 Latino, 1 African American; gender not reported	Participants selected using purposive sampling, focus groups met for two hours with a moderator and observer team, data from audiocassettes and field notes were analyzed.	Students reported family involvement both hindered and facilitated self-determination. Some students felt competent as decision makers; others discussed consequences of poor decisions.
Phillips (1990)	Disability and self-awareness as part of self-advocacy skill training	15 European American, middle class adolescents with LD; Male n=13 Female n=2	Standardized, open-ended interview data, field notes and observation data were collected, coding and analysis followed.	Students reacted positively to the program and stated its usefulness in accessing services.

Although each investigation adds important information to the self-determination knowledge base, further study is necessary to more comprehensively understand CLD students' perceptions regarding the self-determination approach to this process. As illustrated by Table 2.1, CLD students were either not included or were

included in small numbers. Without in depth inquiry into the preferences and practices of CLD students' and their families' ways of characterizing and addressing LD, we cannot determine the appropriateness or the efficacy of existing models which essentially address the needs and strengths of European American students. Current efforts must focus on the preferences of a broader group of students and their families.

Utilizing qualitative research to close the gap in self-determination/postsecondary transition research can provide greater depth to current insights. The strength of qualitative methods lies in their ability to describe the diverse needs that must be addressed to facilitate outcomes for unique constituencies (Patton, 1990). As teachers read qualitative narratives, they gain a more intimate understanding of the participants' perspectives as they construct meaning from the text (Anzul et al., 2001). Teachers stand to gain a deeper understanding of the participation preferences and strategies used by CLD students hearing the voices of these students, which have been customarily ignored.

CHAPTER THREE

Methods

Researchers have tended to study teacher and parent perceptions of the special education process. Rarely do studies address student perceptions regarding their participation in this process; when they do, racial/ethnic identity and its impact on student choices, decisions, and participation styles has not been the focus of such studies. Understanding how students perceive their own roles in postsecondary transition and what preferences and strategies they have for self-determination can augment this body of literature. Addressing the significance of racial/ethnic identity on self-determination during postsecondary transition can further narrow gaps in research. The purpose of this study is to collect and analyze the perceptions of CLD students with LD regarding their participation in this process and to ascertain whether perspectives differ by racial/ethnic group membership among students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Participants

Participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling and were organized into focus groups of African American, Latino, and European American participants. Focus groups that include people with similar backgrounds can facilitate discussion of issues affecting members' lives (Patton, 1990). Additionally, adolescents may be more likely to feel inhibited about expressing unique opinions in front of their

friends (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996). Therefore, the study was designed to include participants from several schools so that participants would feel that they could express their opinions with some degree of anonymity. None of the participants in the focus groups indicated that they were familiar with each other, with one exception. During the focus group meeting with African American participants, one participant acknowledged seeing another "around the halls at school."

As recommended in the literature (Vaughn et al., 1996), purposive sampling was accomplished through contacts with people who knew students who met the criteria for participation. These criteria were: a) male, b) 16 years or older, c) receiving services as a student with LD, and d) eligible to receive free or reduced lunch programs (FRLP). Whether participants met the first three criteria was documented first by using school census information maintained on the special education departmental databases. Information was then confirmed using records contained in special education folders. Participant eligibility based on the fourth criterion, eligibility for FRLP, was completed in one of three ways: documentation in FRLP records of students receiving FRLP, student/parent reports that students were receiving FRLP, and/or documentation of eligibility based on socioeconomic variables such as student's home address and census tract information and social history information.

Site

A pool of potential participants was identified in the Southwest Metropolitan School District (SMSD). Of the total student population, 45.8% were Latino, 34.7% are European Americans, 16.7% were African American, 2.5% were Asian, and .25% Native American Indian. More specifically, district-level demographic information showed that of the 873 SMSD students with LD, ages 16 and older, 48% were Latino, 28% were European Americans, 23% were African American, .03% were Native American, and .02% were Asian. Sufficient numbers of students from each of the three largest ethnic groups were available for sample selection.

Each of the schools included in the study had representation of each of the three largest racial/ethnic groups that were the focus of this study. City High School (CHS) was located in the south central part of a large urban area. The student body, 55.5% of which was identified as economically disadvantaged, was comprised of 76.2% Latino students, 12% European American students, and 10.6% African American students. At Field High School (FHS), a campus located in southern-most area of SMSD, and just within city limits, 33.4% of students were considered economically disadvantaged. The racial/ethnic makeup of the student body was 53.8% Latino, 30% European American, and 14.2% African American. The third school, Southern High School (SHS), was located in southern part of town, amidst commercial businesses and middle- and low-income neighborhoods. The racial/ethnic breakdown of the three largest groups

included for participation in this study were: 51% Latino, 38% European American, and 10% African American.

Sample

Participants were males in SMSD high schools who are at least 16 years of age, and who were receiving special education services as students with LD. Additionally, students were participants in or eligible for the free/reduced cost lunch programs. Focus groups were comprised of 3 African Americans, 5 European Americans, and 5 Latinos.

Lastly, participants had current ITP components included in their IEPs, as well as annual IEP/ITP meetings scheduled during the fall or winter of 2002. Insufficient referrals of students who met the last criterion, that is, those who had ITP meetings scheduled for the fall or winter of 2002, necessitated the inclusion of students whose ITP meeting dates fell outside of this target period. Therefore, the group of students whose ITP meetings were observed by me was a subset of the entire participant group. Implications of this will be addressed in subsequent discussions of this study.

Instruments and Procedures

Instruments

Several data collection instruments were designed for this study.

Document review data collection form. The document review data collection form was modeled after the SMSD ITP form. Key sections on the ITP for this district included information about the student, collaboration with outside agencies,

postsecondary expectations, committee member signatures, dates of plan generation and review, and methods of obtaining student participation. Space for recording the individualized transition plan objectives comprised the largest section of the form. This section of the ITP was organized by transitional domain and included the following: employment, independent living, recreation/community, postsecondary education, transportation, income resources, medical, and other considerations. Space for recording who was responsible for providing a service or accomplishing an objective was provided. Also, space for noting the beginning and ending dates for consideration of the objectives, as well as the status of progress, using predetermined codes, was on the form. Many of the students' special education folders also contained a supplemental transition component added to the IEP, which was a new district requirement. The supplemental forms were brief, and consisted of a list of transition domains and provided space to write a statement for each area. Both forms, whenever available, were examined for relative information. See Appendix A for a copy of the data collection form.

Focus group interview guide. The interview guide included non-dichotomous, open-ended questions. General topics covered included students' future plans, current efforts to reach their goals, and participation in ITP/IEP meetings. See Appendix B for the interview protocol.

Procedures

Project approval. Review boards for research involving human subjects at both The University of Texas at Austin and SMSD approved the study. In addition to submitting my proposal for research projects to both research accountability offices, I utilized the required UT consent template for parent/guardian consent letters. These were written in both Spanish and English. Each letter is contained in Appendix C.

Of the 12 area high schools, eight schools had 25% or more of their enrollees classified as economically disadvantaged. "Economically disadvantaged is a term for students who are receiving free or reduced cost lunch" (Texas Education Agency, 2001). These eight schools, ranging in enrollment of economically disadvantaged students from 25.1% to 61.7%, were invited to participate in the study.

Once permission from the district and university offices of research and human subjects was granted, I submitted a description of my study and cover letter of invitation to each of the eight schools. I followed each letter with a telephone call, and when given the opportunity, a meeting with the principal. Three principals consented to include their campuses in the study, two principals declined participation, and three principals were inaccessible by telephone, letter, or personal appointment.

Nominations and selection of participants. During Phase I of recruitment, I established relationships with school personnel who could provide me with a list of potential participants. These were special education personnel at each of the three

campuses including transition specialists, or Vocational Adjustment Coordinators (VACs), and special education case managers who were department chairs. At CHS, the principal introduced me to the special education chairperson and explained that my study was be conducted at their school and that she would need to cooperate with me. At FHS and SHS, I arranged meetings with school personnel.

Initially, I intended to work through the selection process with VACs, as these personnel focus on the transitional needs of students. As this process progressed, however, my contacts from each campus included special education teachers and VACs. Each contact used the school database to create a list of all students who met the criteria for participation. This required me to interact with the data support service personnel at each site. At each school, a master list of students who met the criteria was generated. I then used this list to send out a packet of information at both SHS and CHS. The packet contained a cover letter that briefly explained the research project and was signed by the special education department chair at each site, a consent form that explained the study, its purpose, the research activities, and possible risks of participation in detail, and a stamped envelope pre-addressed to the researcher. The letter stated that the researcher would contact each potential participant by telephone to answer questions and discuss possible participation in the research project. (Both the English- and Spanish-language versions of this letter, in addition to the English- and Spanish-language versions consent slip, are contained in Appendix C.)

One week after I sent the packet to each potential participant, I called families and asked them whether they had received the packet, and whether they had any questions for me. Of the 62 potential participants contacted, 10 declined to join the study, 23 said that they were interested and would like to further discuss participation with other members of the family, and four agreed to join the study. Twenty-one potential participants were not accessible by telephone. Additionally, four letters were returned by the postal service as undeliverable.

Generally, my initial telephone contact was with parents/guardians. If they were interested, I offered to speak directly to the adolescent to answer any potential questions and obtain either his permission to participate. Some parents/guardians had already spoken to their son about the study so this was not necessary or desired by the family. For those who agreed to join the study, arrangements were made to collect consent forms. All consenting families preferred to sign the permission slip, and return it to the school.

Occasionally, my initial telephone contact was with the student. If the student was 18 years or older, I discussed the invitation directly with him. If the student was younger than 18 years old, I asked to speak to the parent/guardian first. In either case, if the potential participant was undecided or if he agreed to participate, I made contact with the parents/guardians, asked for their consent, and offered to answer questions. I spoke Spanish to parents/guardians upon request, or offered to speak Spanish if it

appeared to be used in the home. If the student answered the telephone and communicated that he was not interested in participation, I made no further effort to reach either the potential participant or the parent/guardian.

This phase of recruitment lasted about two weeks. During this time, I contacted SHS and CHS students as Field High School prepared a list of potential participants. At the end of the two-week period in which I conducted follow-up contact with students and families from CHS and SHS, FHS did provide me with a report that contained all potential participants at that school.

A new policy requiring external researchers to work with an SMSD liaison went into effect in May 2002, thus requiring that I postpone the completion of Phase I of recruitment. I was given permission to resume recruitment in the fall with the aid of SMSD employees who would be responsible for acquiring lists of potential participants and their contact information, mailing initial packets of information about the study and consent to participate, contacting families to determine their interest in participation, and obtaining written permission. Consistent with this policy, data base information was given to the liaison who assisted me once school resumed in the fall. Because of this change in policy, I was unable to include potential participants who initially said they were interested yet undecided. I did contact participants (N=4) who previously provided written consent slips for their participation and explained that I would contact

them in the fall to determine when and where the focus group discussions would take place.

Phase II, the recruitment efforts following the change in policy, began in mid-August, 2002. I contacted principals to confirm whether they were still willing to participate and secured their continued consent. Principals at all three schools gave consent over the telephone. Field High School had a new principal, so I met with her and obtained written consent. I then began to re-establish connections with special education department chairs. I explained that their involvement would be more integral in determining a list of potential participants because of the new district policy. I offered a $250 incentive for one teacher at each site to assist me in the recruitment process and to act as a liaison. I estimated that this commitment would take no less than eight hours of work and no more than 20 hours.

The special education chair at SHS invited me to talk to the teachers at lunch and see if anyone was interested in becoming my liaison. A European American female teacher agreed to work with me. At CHS and FHS, the special education chairs decided to announce the opportunity at departmental meetings and contact me with the names of interested teachers. One teacher from CHS, an African American female, agreed to assist me. At FHS, a European American female teacher agreed to recruit participants. The process of identifying liaisons from the district took approximately one month.

Once identified, I met with each teacher liaison separately to discuss our respective roles in the recruitment process. I provided each with a participant criteria list, recruitment procedure, and telephone script. The district forwarded my original contact database to each liaison. None of the liaisons was bilingual; therefore they made arrangements to use the school translator if they needed to communicate with families in Spanish. See Appendix D for the documents I presented to each liaison.

Upon meeting with each liaison, we reviewed the documents and made arrangements to secure the database previously used in Phase I. I provided SMSD liaisons with sufficient packets, each including an updated Phase II cover letter (also contained in Appendix C), consent form, and stamped, pre-addressed return envelopes, to mail to all potential participants. I also discussed with them a target date of completion, which was about three weeks from the date they were to begin recruitment. We then exchanged contact information.

District liaisons (special education teachers at each of the sites) secured updated potential participants from the data base managers at their schools. In addition to the lists of potential participants I used during Phase I recruitment, each teacher needed to update the lists to account for new students as well as eliminate students who were no longer in attendance, as the new school year had begun. I provided more packets as necessary. Special education data base information, in conjunction with free and reduced lunch program data base information, was secured by each liaison. More

students than needed were referred for participation. I gave priority in sample selection to students who had ITP meetings scheduled between September 30, 2002, and December 15, 2002, so I could be observe their ITP meetings. Ultimately, though, the qualification was not applied because at each school a small number of students were interested in participation in the study.

Phase II recruitment took approximately three months. Referral databases of potential participants, based on special education criteria, were more accessible than information regarding participation in FRLP. The latter information was more difficult to determine because it is generally not accessible to teachers. Therefore, the three liaisons had to crosscheck potential participants receiving services for LD with lists of lunch program recipients maintained by campus-level data processing personnel or cafeteria managers.

Documenting participant eligibility based on the third criterion, eligibility for FRLP, was problematic and time-consuming. Initially, the criterion was that student participants *were receiving* FRLP. However, teachers and data processing personnel indicated that high school students generally do not apply for this service because it is a source of embarrassment or because the students choose not to eat the cafeteria food. Therefore, the criterion was altered to include students who *were eligible to receive* FRLP. Consistent with district policy, eligibility of potential participants based on this criterion was determined by the liaison. In most cases documenting this information

about each potential participant was done prior to mailing informational letters informing students of the opportunity to participate in this project.

Nevertheless, some students received informational letters and intended to participate, but their FRLP status was undocumented. For example, special education liaisons at SHS indicated that the potential pool received from the data processing personnel were all FRLP eligible. As I began to confirm the accuracy of this information, I found that this information was incorrect for several students. Special education teachers were basing their answers to my initial inquiry on personal experiences with students. For example, one liaison said, "I'm not sure about him, if he is on FRLP. He wears nice clothes." When I indicated that I needed accurate information for this criterion, I was instructed by principals and special education liaisons at each school to contact either data processing personnel or cafeteria personnel to confirm the FRLP status of students.

Of the 16 participants in this study, FRLP status was confirmed for 10 students via campus-level data processing personnel. The confirmation of four additional students occurred via cafeteria-based data processing personnel. For two participants FRLP status was confirmed by combining a series of variables. Specifically, student self-reporting eligibility in combination with census tract data, and updated social history (e.g., parent/guardian's highest level of education) were used to determine

eligibility. Three potential participants, who had submitted signed consent forms during Phase I of recruitment, were eliminated because they were not ineligibile for FRLP.

Recruitment resulted in a total of 17 participants, 6 of whom were European American, 5 of whom were African American, and 6 of whom were Latino. Participants' names (pseudonyms), ages, and race/ethnic identities are compiled in Table 3.1. The two African Americans and one Latino who were not present for the focus group interviews were also unavailable for the individual interviews and were thus dropped from the research project.

Table 3.1
Participants' Identifying Information

Group membership	Age	Grade	School
African American			
DeShawn	18	12	City
Martin	16	10	City
Ron	18	11	Southern
Thomas	16	11	Southern
Wyndell	17	12	Field
European American			
Earl	16	10	Field
Forest	17	10	Southern
Joe	17	10	Southern
Marshall	16	10	City
Sam	16	10	Field
Trent	16	9	Field
Latino			
Gilberto	17	11	Field
Tony	17	12	Southern
Jesus	17	11	Southern
Ricky	17	12	City
Jaime	19	12	City
□Michael	16	10	Field

Consent. The consent form was written in Spanish and English. Double-sided copies (English on one side, Spanish on the other) were sent to students whose race/ethnicity was listed as "Hispanic" in school databases so that both languages were readily accessible to parents. The liaison explained orally, as well as in writing, that they were under no obligation to join the study and were free to withdraw participation at any time. Additionally, I included information about incentives for participation ($50 gift certificates) and recording equipment that would be used during focus groups and follow-up interviews. If parent/guardian and students indicated consent, they both signed the form and returned it to the liaison at the student's school.

I provided all participants with one copy for their records and I placed one copy of the signed consent in each student's special education folder as is required by district policy. Student/parent copies were mailed to their home addresses along with a letter thanking them for agreeing to participate and information about subsequent contact regarding focus group meeting times and locations. (See Appendix E for the English- and Spanish-language versions of this letter.)

Scheduling and location. Focus groups were held in small meeting rooms of branch libraries that were centrally located among the three high school campuses. Each of the focus groups met during the second and third week of December 2002. The focus group meetings were scheduled in the late afternoon or early evening and lasted between one and two hours. Food and refreshments were provided.

To encourage attendance, I visited each campus and provided participants with a written memo/invitation to the focus group meeting. I included the time and place of the meeting, as well as my contact information. As I met with each student the week prior to the focus group meetings, I introduced myself, thanked them for their participation, and inquired about their access to transportation to get to the meeting. None of the participants who indicated transportation was an issue utilized the option of taking a taxi to the meeting although this had been prearranged.

Moderator aide preparation. Moderator aides were included in the design of this research project to prevent possible distractions to me, as the moderator, caused by the demands of multi-tasking (Vaughn et al., 1996). Moreover, because the credibility, or the accuracy with which the researcher is able to elicit and represent the perceptions of participants, is necessarily impacted by the researcher's personal background (Patton, 1990), I included moderator aides who were racially/ethnically representative of focus group members' ethnicity/race. The moderator aides were male, as they reflected the gender of the participants. Involving an insider member of the gender of each racial/ethnic group creates an opportunity for an increased level of credibility essential to qualitative interviews (Patton, 1990). In addition to taking notes, assisting with the equipment, and facilitating interview activities, moderator aides acted as cultural brokers if they believe I had unwittingly broken communication norms or crossed culturally appropriate boundaries.

The three moderator aides had experience working with adolescents, were interested in educational research, and whom I knew to be reliable. I offered a stipend of $100 in exchange for four to five hours of work. In my initial contact with each male, I briefly described my project and my rationale for recruiting male moderator aides of specific race/ethnicity. (See Table 3.2 for a description of the moderator aides.)

Table 3.2
Moderator Aides' Identifying Information

Name	Race/Ethnicity	Qualifications
Ty	African American	Undergraduate student in education, music instructor for adolescents
John	European American	Masters in Education, special education high school teacher
Miguel	Latino	Undergraduate student in education, completed student teaching as high school history teacher

To prepare each moderator aide, I sent them a copy of my research proposal and asked them to read it prior to the training session. I trained each moderator aide separately, to accommodate his unique schedule. We met for one hour on campus and I provided them with printed material regarding the focus group interview procedures and our respective roles in the process (see Appendix F for copies of this material). I invited them to ask questions or make comments based on either my proposal or on the information we covered during training.

The logistics of schedules and locations for focus group meetings, and the rationale for attempting to include moderator aides who more closely resembled the participants in each group were discussed. I acknowledged that I had extensive experience relating to and conversing with adolescent males, and that I felt comfortable in my role as moderator. My goal in discussing the latter topic was to clarify for the moderator aides that I did not expect them to "translate" students' participation to me as an outsider. Their role was to observe and note, if necessary, when a possible communication breakdown or misunderstanding occurred. Together the moderator aides and I determined that, unless some egregious communication breakdown occurred, they would share their observations with me after the focus group meetings and I would use the individual follow-up interviews to address any misunderstandings as I conducted member checking. In the case of an obvious communication breakdown, the moderator aide was instructed to indicate this to me during the focus group interviews so that I could rephrase a question or probe responses as necessary. Additionally, I asked them to make note of any communication styles they identified or recognized as distinctly cultural. As an example, we discussed the use of eye contact during communication. These observations were to be shared with me during debriefing.

Lastly, during each moderator aide training session I stressed my desire to facilitate the participants' participation by making them feel comfortable. I asked the

moderator aides to dress casually and to be friendly and warm to the participants, particularly upon their arrival. We discussed topics appropriate for informal conversation and warm-ups (e.g., movies, school, sports) to engage the participants in conversation prior to the actual focus group interview. I explained the need for the moderator aides to refrain from being judgmental toward the participants and to react to participant responses to my questions in a neutral manner.

Focus group materials. I prepared video and audio recording equipment prior to the focus group meetings. Other materials for the meetings included: refreshments, nametags, a follow up questionnaire for participants writing utensils, and gift certificates to compensate participants for their time. The purpose of the follow up questionnaire was to update contact data.

Data Collection

Naturalistic inquiry is central to the design of this study in that participant perspectives and experiences were explored as they naturally unfolded (Patton, 1990). I recorded data as it was generated in two natural settings. First, participants contributed data in their own words during semi-structured focus group discussions among their peers and in follow-up individual interviews. Additionally, I conducted observations of a subset of participants as they took part in IEP/ITP meetings. Further, to triangulate data, I reviewed IEP/ITPs of each student participant. Utilizing several sources, some spoken by the participants, some observed by me, and some written by other key

players (e.g.,, teachers), contributed to the accuracy and adequacy of the data. Data collection activities included recording field notes, and conducting document reviews, observations, and interviews.

Field Notes

Each time I contacted school personnel, participants, and/or their parents/guardians, I recorded field notes. This included contacts via the telephone or those made in-person. I held numerous conversations about the recruitment process with the liaisons, special education department chairs, and school principals. In addition, I visited the school to conduct ITP observations and document reviews. In total, I visited the campuses 33 times. The majority of visits were between two and three hours in length and consisted of me reviewing documents, conducting observations, and conducting follow up interviews. Other visits were short and consisted of me dropping off or picking up consent forms in the main office. School visits, as the details recorded in my field notes suggest, gave me the opportunity to observe elements of the school culture at each campus. Such notes will be included in the results and analysis of this report.

Document Reviews

Document reviews have the potential to provide information regarding the background and context of a situation that can give insight into current practices (Mertens & McLaughlin, 1995). A review of participants' ITPs provided me with

contextual background information regarding formal transition planning and ITP goals. Also, document reviews indicated information about participants' participation in, and exposure to, self-determination curricula. All document reviews were completed prior to the focus group interviews.

I reviewed the current ITPs of each participant. Specifically, I recorded who attended the ITP meeting. Also, I examined to what extent self-determination was incorporated into the goals and objectives and whether goals required students to exercise choice and decision-making, self-assess, and take action on their own behalf. I recorded the content of the ITPs verbatim. I wanted to familiarize myself with the inclusion of the self-determination principles, to later be able to determine whether the ITPs reflected students' input about their plans for the future as they were revealed in interviews, and eventually, to triangulate data.

Observations

As suggested in the literature (Eder & Fingerson, 2002), observing participants in IEP/ITP meetings before implementing focus groups provided me with a greater understanding of these adolescents' communication norms and patterns, as well as culture and social structure. More importantly, observing how participants participated in the very activity I would subsequently interview them about was helpful in that I was able to note how they responded to issues relative to transition planning. I was also able to observe their behaviors that demonstrated self-determination. Another central

purpose of the observations was to note relevant information that remains unnoticed, and therefore unspoken, by the participants themselves and confirmed participants' perceptions regarding their participation in ITP meetings (Patton, 1990). For example, I thought participants might not readily identify their efforts to engage in discussion about the future as "transition planning," and therefore might fail to articulate the extent to which they are involved in the ITP process. During observations, I paid attention to their level of involvement so that I could compare what they did and how they talked about what they did. Additionally, I was able to observe participants in a group of peers (during the focus groups), in a group of adults (during IEP/ITP meetings), and in individual interviews, which revealed differing comfort zones.

Originally, I designed the methods of this study to include an ITP meeting observation of each participant. As I received completed consent forms, I confirmed the date of the participants' upcoming ITP meeting. I was able to observe seven ITP meetings. Two of the ITP meetings I observed were of participants who were later eliminated from the study because they were ineligible for FRLP. A third observation, was also eliminated from later analysis because the student dropped out of the study.

During observations, I remained a passive observer, as described in research methodology literature (Mertens & McLaughlin, 1995). When asked specific questions, I kept my participation to a minimum. For example, one special education teacher asked me if I would be participating in generating the ITP and I explained that I would

just observe. During another ITP meeting, the special education teacher asked me how long it took students to perform a task habitually; I answered that I did not know.

I kept a running record of how often student participated. I recorded field notes on the topic of discussion as well as the input from participants and other members of the IEP/ITP team. I also noted participants' silence and nonparticipation. Video taping IEP/ITP meetings was not permitted; therefore, I checked the accuracy of my observations with participants during follow-up interviews.

Focus Groups

As qualitative inquiry focuses on participants' verbatim responses (Patton, 1990), I used both a video recorder and tape recorder (as back-up) to capture data. I explained to the students, both before the meeting in the form of the consent letter, and during the focus group interview, that I was using recording equipment. I also took notes, as did the moderator aide, during the focus groups meetings to augment my transcriptions of the video/audio recordings, as is suggested in the literature (Patton, 1990). I attempted to dedicate my attention to affirming the participation of group members through eye contact and other body language, thus my notes were brief.

Interview rapport. To a great extent, the openness and sincerity of the participants is contingent upon the relationship the researcher establishes with them during the initial contact and every meeting thereafter (Seidman, 1998). I made every attempt to build rapport in my brief contacts with participants prior to the focus group

meeting. I wanted to disassociate myself with school personnel so that participants would not speak to me as though I was a teacher or other school personnel associated with assessing their needs as a student in special education. As I met participants during ITP observations or while I was distributing invitations to the focus group meetings, I was friendly and thanked them for their participation in my study. I dressed casually during school visits and focus group meetings and I introduced myself by my first name. I was mindful of the power differential stemming from the school hierarchy, my status as a university student, and the age difference between participants and myself. My main goal during these contacts was to be respectful and establish equity between myself and the participants I would interview.

Implementation. As suggested in the literature regarding adolescent focus group meetings (Vaughn et al., 1996), the duration of each focus group meetings was approximately one hour. Initially, the moderator aide and I focused on creating an atmosphere in which the participants felt comfortable. At each of the three meetings, participants arrived individually. I met them in the lobby of the library and walked with them to the meeting room. I invited them to grab a soda and piece of pizza and I introduced them to the moderator aide. As I greeted participants, the moderator aide engaged participants in conversation about school, home, food, sports, etc.

Following the suggestion of Vaughn et al. (1996), I gave participants nametags and then explained the purpose of my research project. I attempted to make participants

feel appreciated and valued for their participation by explaining that their opinions and ideas were important and that by sharing them with me, they had the opportunity to help teachers understand how to better assist participants as they transition from high school to adulthood. I also assured them that their participation would be anonymous. I explained that I would share the results of our discussion with teachers and that I would use pseudonyms for each of them. Lastly, I explained that each question was open-ended and that I was not looking for "right" answers. I asked them to share their opinions candidly.

Of the 16 participants, four did not attend focus group sessions. Two were African American, one was European American, and one was Latino. The final composition of each focus group is included in Table 3.3. Every attempt was made to contact absent participants on the day of the meeting and determine their reason for not attending. None were reachable by telephone. School visits were made to make contact with these participants and invite them to participate in the individual interview portion of the research project.

The focus group interview protocol is included in Appendix B. Questions were designed to elicit participant responses about their perceptions and behaviors as they pertained to self-determination. Rather than using the phrase, "self-determination," I asked them about their roles and responsibilities in choice-making, decision-making, and goal setting, all of which are component tasks of self-determination (Field, 1996;

Schloss et al., 1994; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). Additionally, I asked participants about their participation in ITP/IEP meetings. Clarifying key terms was also necessary from time to time (Vaughn et al., 1996). For example, participants indicated that they were unsure about the meaning of the term, "transition plan." I described the meaning of the term and invited participants to ask questions if they needed clarification. Throughout the interview, I strayed from my protocol to probe comments from participants or ask questions based on participant responses.

Once I had exhausted my protocol and participation seemed to slow down, I invited participants to ask questions or make comments on the topic. Few decided to initiate further conversation. To wrap up, I again thanked them for their participation and reminded them of their anonymity. I explained that I would be contacting them shortly to set up a time for the follow-up interview; participants wrote times and places they would be most available on their follow-up questionnaires. I gave them gift certificates, the agreed incentive for participation, and asked the participants to fill out a short follow-up questionnaire that would allow me to update their address and telephone information (see Appendix G). One final question, "Do you have your driver's license?" was included as a result of data I collected from document reviews. This issue will be discussed in subsequent discussion.

Table 3.3
Focus Group Composition

Group membership	Age	Grade	Campus
African American			
DeShawn	18	12	City
Martin	16	10	City
Ron	18	11	Southern
European American			
Earl	16	10	Field
Forest	17	10	Southern
Joe	17	10	Southern
Marshall	16	10	City
Sam	16	10	Field
Trent	16	9	Field
Latino			
Tony	17	12	Southern
Jesus	17	11	Southern
Ricky	17	12	City
Jaime	19	12	City
☐ Michael	16	10	Field

After each of the three meetings, I debriefed with the moderator aide. This process consisted of reviewing any notes taken during the interview and discussing the protocol questions and participant responses. Debriefing also probed moderator aide impressions of the impact race/ethnicity (mine, theirs, and the participants) on the focus group discussion.

Follow Up Interviews

Follow-up interviews provide the opportunity for participants to respond to questions and issues individually and has the potential to maximize participant input

(Eder & Fingerson, 2002). Moreover, these interviews were unencumbered by peer pressure. Rather than asking participants to review the focus group transcripts, I used the original protocol and probed participant's earlier responses to the questions during the focus group interviews. For example, I would say, "In the group interview you mentioned your goal to start your own business and your interest in physics and calculus, how did those dreams come to mind or develop in you?" I summarized the major themes participants contributed to the focus group interviews during individual interviews (Vaughn et al., 1996). I also asked participants clarify comments or expound on their original responses.

In the individual interviews I referred back to topics and questions that had been asked during the focus group interviews, because I felt the topic of transition and futures planning had been difficult for participants to discuss in a group. Many of the participants said that they did not enjoy talking about transition planning because they had not given much prior thought to this topic. Therefore, during follow up interviews I wanted to provide ample opportunity for participants to contribute any thoughts or ideas on the topic that occurred to them after the focus group experience.

In total, 14 individual interviews were conducted. Thirteen of the participants were present for focus group interviews. One participant, a European American, did participate in an individual interview but was not present for focus group interviews. As a result, three observations are included in the data analysis of this research project.

Research Design

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research provides an avenue of expression for people whose voices have been either disregarded or misrepresented (Anzul et al., 2001; Patton, 1990). In the case of postsecondary transition, factors other than disability, such as race, socioeconomic status and gender, all of which contribute to cultural identity, impact the success with which adolescents attain mainstream success in adulthood. Pugach (2001) discourages special education researchers from avoiding issues of equity and power. Postsecondary transition outcomes for CLD students, with and without disabilities, are not equal to those of their European American peers. Disparities in dropout rates, employment rates, wages, and enrollment in postsecondary educational programs are compounded by societal problems such as racism, as well as issues related to disability. My intent was to use qualitative methods to embrace a more critical approach to the study of postsecondary outcomes.

Qualitative studies, which characteristically include rich descriptions of context, can provide necessary clues about students' sociocultures (Pugach, 2001). A holistic approach, characteristic of qualitative research, allowed me, along with the participants, to examine the complexities of diversity from a multitude of angles, not solely from within the walls of the school (Patton, 1990). For example, I was able to examine how participants perceived their own roles in the transition planning process, and in some

cases, how they behaved in the transition planning process during ITP meetings. I was also able to probe their perceptions about opportunities for self-determination that fall outside of the traditional benchmarks of living independently or individualistic choice-making strategies because I could probe their responses and thoughts about the decisions and choices they faced.

Without directly talking to adolescents, our understanding of self-determination is limited to adult perceptions of the concept and its implementation. For example, if we expect students to lead ITP meetings, self-disclose strengths and weaknesses, and ask for services and accommodations, we need to understand how they feel about carrying out these tasks. This qualitative study utilized document reviews, observations, focus group and individual interview data, and narrative analysis methods to dig deeply into this topic. Narrative analysis is a particularly appropriate method for data generated by teenagers as it can provide insight into adolescents' cognitive and social development (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Lastly, narrative analysis is an effective way to learn more about real-life problems, such as postsecondary transition.

Common discussion of postsecondary transition, or "What I want to do with my life," is a topic adults deem important for teens. By creating a natural setting in which youth are encouraged to talk about the preferences and strategies for futures planning, data regarding their preferences for self-determination in the postsecondary transition

process were able to emerge. The focus group interviews I conducted represent an attempt to create a recognizable activity (conversation) and contexts (talking with peers), which as the literature on adolescent research suggests (Eder & Fingerson, 2002), may motivate participants to discuss their experiences and perspectives by the familiarity of the situation. Hanging out and talking with peers in a group is quite natural for teens and may create a comfortable arena in which they share personal thoughts on an important topic. As an extension of peer culture, group interviews may facilitate a more natural flow of conversation in which collective meaning-making ensues. Group dynamics can offset the imbalance of power between the researcher, an adult and in this case, a former teacher, and the students (Eder & Fingerson, 2002). The extent to which this goal was actualized is discussed in the data analysis section.

Of course, all methodologies involve decisions that impact the breadth and depth of the study, and can be thought of in terms of "trade-offs" (Patton, 1990). Although recording and analyzing narratives of adolescents provided me substantial detail and depth in the lives of the participants, I was limited by the fact that my contact with each participant consisted of two or three in-depth encounters and as many brief contacts. In short, the participants and I remained mere acquaintances. The problem, however, was mitigated by the fact that the voices of even a few CLD students in the postsecondary transition process have not yet been part of in-depth inquiry.

Researcher as Instrument

The quality of qualitative research is judged in part by the researcher's credibility. Credibility in this sense refers to the accuracy with which the researcher is able to represent the perceptions of the participants, which is necessarily impacted by the researcher's personal background (Patton, 1990). Many aspects of my identity may have contributed to my position as both an insider and an outsider. As a European American woman, I may have been considered an outsider in data collection activities that involved African American and Latino participants. My gender may have also contributed to this position for each of the groups, as all participants were male. During ITP meetings, the composition of groups by race/ethnicity and gender of participants was often diverse; my status as a visitor seemed to impact my position as an outsider more than my personal characteristics. While I conducted document reviews in special education departments on each campus, I fluctuated between being a teacher, and therefore an insider, and being a stranger, naturally an outsider.

The issue of what makes a researcher an outsider or an insider is not easily discernible (Behar, 1996). Nor is the significance of positionality limited to data collection; my research design, questions, methods, data collection and analysis are all inextricably linked to my epistemological perspectives. These perspectives are informed by my identities as a person (e.g., my race, gender, class) and as a scholar and the contexts of resources and power which I have accessed, or to which I have been

denied access (Scheurich, 1997). Furthermore, the perspectives of researchers as both outsiders and insiders likely have value and neither can be taken as unquestionable truth. My foremost concern was to avoid making mistakes similar to other European American researchers who have historically contributed to the interpretation and representation of the perceptions and behaviors of people of color and people who have limited political and economic power in our society, resulting in deficit thinking, social reproduction, and misinformation. I attempted to avoid these pitfalls by exposing my biases (Behar, 1996). The idea is that this exposure provided transparency so that the reader could see how these biases influenced the process by which participants and I generated results, and then how I alone interpreted them.

While I was raised in a middle-class home by parents who considered themselves politically liberal, their style of parenting was rather strict. Devout Catholics, my parents believed that their daughter could be self-determining, but only within the parameters they defined for me. On matters related to school, they made many decisions for me, including what courses I took, when and where I studied, and whether I was absent or present for classes. I was not allowed to seek employment during the school year. I never attended teacher conferences with my parents; any information teachers shared with them was not to be questioned or disputed by me. As I researched self-determination literature, I reflected back to my own experiences and wondered how my parents would have reacted if, during a meeting at school, I had

stated my preferences or expressed my opinions to adults. Reflecting on my own upbringing caused me to question how students would fulfill the expectations of the school and those of the home, if the two were not similar or complementary.

As liberal European Americans, my parents raised me to believe that people of all races/ethnicities are equal. They openly discussed with me their own ideological support of the Civil Rights Movement and taught me to question inequitable treatment of people based on racism, classism, and sexism. Until I was an adult, however, my value system guided me to see all people as "one color" or "basically the same" rather than to acknowledge and celebrate differences. My first experience living abroad was the beginning of a long journey to unlearn this liberal stance and develop a new perspective that required me to consider the impact of the dynamic complexities of culture on my own beliefs and values and the acknowledgement that they are not universal. While researching possible mismatches between diverse groups of people and the underlying value system embedded in the special education system, I reflected on my time as a teacher and reexamined the values (e.g., autonomy) that I assumed had been shared by the families I served and how this impacted my efficacy as a special educator.

As an adult, I have very much enjoyed working and socializing in contexts that include diverse groups of people. I have honed my cross-cultural communication skills by pursuing activities that require me to share experiences, both at home and abroad,

with people with whom I ostensibly have little in common. I have pursued the study of a second language, and I have engaged in interpersonal relationships with people from a wide variety of backgrounds. I enjoy the ambiguity of cross-cultural interactions. These experiences potentially impacted the efficacy with which I was able to connect with the participants of my study.

My experience as a special education high school teacher provided me with the experience of working with adolescents with LD. These experiences guided me as I addressed participants with respect and empathy in an effort to create a shared sense of personal credibility and promote openness between us. Although I do not have any type of disability, I have learned to maintain sensitivity in regard to disability labeling and avoid deficit language and assumptions of ablism. For eight years I taught students with LD in self-contained and inclusive settings, which afforded me many opportunities to take part in informal discussions with students both individually and in groups. I appreciate the passion and candor with which adolescents address issues that are significant to them and I very much enjoy listening to their perspectives, which contributed to my ability to build rapport with participants.

Lastly, many people have commented to me that I "wear my heart on my sleeve" or that my emotions are "transparent." At the very least, my own ethnicity (Irish American) thwarts my ability to hide embarrassment or reticence, as I blush easily. During initial encounters, I did my best to warmly introduce myself to

participants and/or their families, which seemed counter to my gut feeling of reticence and discomfort stemming from my dislike of being an outsider demanding of participants' attention. My experience in graduate school has taught me to be critical of issues of race/ethnicity, class, and gender. As a result, I have a lingering, questioning voice in my subconscious that doubts my position as one who intends to make use of the experiences of others. This issue was brought to the forefront during instances where I witnessed participants and/or their families experiencing humiliation or distress relative to the special education process, particularly during the ITP meetings in which I was an observer. During these times, I focused on displaying a neutral stance and made every effort not to reveal judgment. I found this process difficult and responded to participants and/or their families who addressed these issues with me by listening and offering sincere reactions to their comments.

My success as a researcher and interviewer can be judged by the quality of data I gathered. Successful interviews are comprised of participants' in-depth comments about their experiences, emotional reactions, and knowledge (Patton, 1990). In my analysis of the data, I have concluded that participants earnestly revealed their perceptions and behaviors surrounding self-determination during postsecondary transition.

Data Analysis

I began initial data analysis of field-generated data using the process of inscription. LeCompte and Schensul (1999) describe this task as noticing and recording initial details, both expected and unexpected. Using inscription, I generated a list of my preconceptions and used it as a point of comparison to what I discovered during fieldwork. Additionally, I searched for negative examples once the fieldwork had begun (Patton, 1990). I used descriptive writing to elaborate on my perceptions of the entire context within which I collected data. This included scrutinizing participants' behavior, conversation, and interaction styles and recording it in the form of field notes (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). In addition to listening to what participants said during interviews and observations, I also noted their participation styles including their enthusiasm for the topic, their hesitance or willingness to articulate their feelings, and their nonverbal reactions during discussions. Participant narratives were developed through close examination of transcripts of their verbatim responses as well as field notes depicting their participation style and nonverbal communication. Pertinent findings from my document reviews, observation notes, and field notes were used to provide contextual information and narrative descriptions and explanations of emergent themes.

Interview Data

My main sources of data were both the focus groups and follow up individual interviews; I analyzed these data for reoccurring themes. Categorical-content analysis of data is concerned with categorizing units of text that carry a common theme (Lieblich et al., 1998). I allowed the themes to emerge and then connected the themes to my overall topic of self-determination during postsecondary transition. In order to analyze data effectively, I studied it, developed codes that describe themes, and applied the codes to the data. This was a cyclical, rather than linear process; once themes began to emerge it became necessary to revisit data and determine relationships among the themes and ways in which those relationships could contribute to current theory about self-determination during the transition planning process for students with LD.

I conducted line-by-line examination of the text, paying attention to both what was said (literal analysis), and how it was said (semiotic analysis) (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). To aid my organization and analysis of data, I used N4 Classic™, the latest version of NUD*IST for Macintosh computers, which is a commonly used qualitative data analysis software. Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software help researchers search large sets of data, retrieve data for coding, and organize analysis (Seale, 2002).

As an initial step, I prepared base code data and imported that into my NUD*IST project folder. This level of coding was then applied to subsequent data files

in their entirety. For example, I imported Table 3.4 as base code data. As a result, the computer software then coded each document according to these data; therefore, the documents and their extractions contained codes for variables such as age, grade, race/ethnicity, and campus. For example, each time I used a quote from my interview with DeShawn, or a quote of his participation in the focus group interview, it was coded as African American, eighteen-year-old, senior, and student of CHS. This process allowed me to look for patterns across participants by these four variables. The variable for race/ethnicity, an obvious choice for base code data, was the focus of my analysis because my research questions engaged this issue.

Additionally, age, grade, and campus were included because as I conducted my fieldwork I realized the possibility that participants' behavior and perceptions could be influenced by their experiences shaped by these other variables. I realized the necessity to consider these other issues when I observed that older participants demonstrated increased confidence and knowledge of transition related issues during in focus groups.

During school visits and observations, I noticed various aspects of school culture that could contribute to students' perceptions and behaviors of self-determination and participation in transition planning activities. While my field notes revealed more similarities than differences among school cultures, I wanted this type of analysis of results to contribute to the contextualization of data. I kept the limitations of my design foremost in my own approach to the analysis of results. I did not conduct

case studies of each campus and thus did not research school culture thoroughly in this project. Nevertheless, I did not want to suppress the data that could reveal important variation across campuses.

Once base code data tables had been imported, I began open coding. I imported each data file of transcribed interviews into NUD*IST. I then read each file and highlighted key quotes from the participants while simultaneously creating nodes, or categories, of analysis. For example, I developed a node for analysis, which I entitled, Pro Athlete. This node was a subcategory of the node, Goals.

> [My parents] almost go to all of my games. They know the way I play. They had asked me if I wanted to be a soccer player and I said, 'Yeah.'
> [Jaime, Latino Focus Group, 71]

As the Goals node expanded to include students' dreams and hopes in a variety of domains (e.g., occupations, education, daily living), Pro Athlete became a subcategory of Occupations, which was itself a subcategory of Postsecondary Goals, which was a subcategory of Goals. With succeeding analysis, nodes became more complex.

Commonly, quotes, or text units, could fit into multiple categories. In the above quote, for example, Jaime not only states one of his career goals, he also touches on the topic of parent support. Students across groups talked about the importance of the support of their parents/guardians, so many text units were fitted into this category. Eventually, the content of this category became too inclusive and some of the nuances of meaning of different text units led to more discreet categorization (e.g., Emotional

Support, Skill Development, Material Support). Larger nodes were divided into smaller, more discreet ones, and analysis continued. As a detailed look at analysis reveals, parent support, as defined by participants of differing racial/ethnic groups, varied.

At times, nodes were merged or renamed. Self-knowledge eventually became a node of the larger category, Self-Determination, because the relationship between the two illustrated a subordinate affiliation. In other words, participants were talking about their understanding of themselves and how that understanding informed their examples of the extent to which they engaged in self-determinating behaviors.

Assigning names to nodes in NUD*IST can be arbitrary. For this project, the names I selected reflected what I perceived to be the key identifying characteristic of the text units I grouped together. For example, participants gave examples of instances when teachers hindered or ignored their transition planning efforts. Initially, I named the node that held these text units Derailers. As analysis continued, however, the relationship between student and teacher, rather than the teacher herself, emerged as the focal point for situations where students felt unsupported. The term Derailers did not capture the gist of the text units in the category. Students were talking about situations in which they and their teachers were not sufficiently connected in order to advance the transition plan, rather than situations in which teachers had actually sabotaged their efforts.

As the first round of open coding was completed, I developed a conceptual tree of nodes for analysis. For example, under the main category, Goals, subcategories included Postsecondary and Short-Term. Short-term then divided into Immediate and High School Graduation. The Immediate node was then split into subcategories of Earning Money, Academic Success, and Clean-Up Act. Some of these nodes needed to be further divided into smaller subcategories. Goals for postsecondary education were divided into two subcategories, University and Community. Goals for postsecondary education were organized according to the details they revealed. Each naming and categorizing step, I was reacting to the data. In this example, I created the subcategories of University and Community because I was struck by what I perceived as incongruence between participants' career goals and their postsecondary educational goals so these were examined.

As categories developed and became more complex, I utilized mechanisms within the software to record my thoughts as I reacted to the data and moved forward with theoretical coding. First, initial definitions of categories were recorded, and then shifts in the category definitions and/or criteria were recorded as I tracked the process of conceptualizing the major themes. I discerned how the categories were alike or different, and established relationships. Second, I recorded memos, or notes, on documents and nodes. I recorded my reactions to interviews, quotes, and analysis that were later used in theorizing. In NUD*IST, each memo becomes a part of the data, and

can therefore be coded, searched, and analyzed. Third, I developed a conceptual tree of categories of analysis. NUD*IST enables users to view the tree, make memos at any node, and arrange and rearrange categories. This process includes merging categories, separating them, moving them from one parent category to another, and various other tasks that are useful in the early stages of analysis. Each of these stages was practiced recursively and continued without a discreet beginning or end through various readings of interview documents and nodes and their contents.

I analyzed the intersection between categories of text units (from both open and theoretical coding) and race/ethnic groups of students. For example, students across groups discussed the importance and influence of extended family during the transition planning process. Here I used the software to find any quote that I categorized as a discussion about extended family members (contained in the node named Kin), and then sorted those text units into categories based on the racial/ethnic group membership of the speaker.

Browsing through the intersection of two nodes in NUD*IST is called index searching. The software is designed so that all searches become their own nodes. Open coding attempts, along with and early theoretical coding, resulted in about 157 nodes. Conducting index searches of each node for each of the racial/ethnic groups resulted in and additional 471 nodes. To analyze perceptions and behaviors of each group, I used these index search nodes to examine the comments of the members of each group. I

then wrote an initial narrative analysis of each group. This resulted in three separate narratives, which I compared to one another. I sifted through preliminary narratives and searched for differences and commonalities. During this process I also searched for themes. As I worked on these two tasks, I recorded daily notes on my reactions to the data and I combined my analysis of groups in a comprehensive narrative describing the participants' perceptions and behaviors.

In order to continually keep my analysis grounded in the data, I conducted text searches to locate evidence that would either substantiate or negate my analysis. For example, while trying to determine patterns in the participants' comments on disability, I began to wonder if I was correct in my interpretation that only a few of the students discussed their own disability. By conducting a text search in NUD*IST, I was able to enter words and phrases such as "disability" and "special education" and generate additional nodes of relevant data, perhaps catching something I missed during open coding. The text search results were labeled and stored, resulting in 80 additional nodes. I used to categories to crosscheck my analysis.

I relied heavily on the direct and verbatim quotes of the participants to support my interpretation. Although the final product, contained in Chapter Four of this study, is representative of my interpretations of data, I chose to include many of the actual text units themselves, rather than paraphrasing participants' words. I wanted the reader to

hear what the student said. In the presentation of results, however, I did make exceptions to this rule that are described here.

Because NUD*IST required text units to be signaled by carriage returns, text units could be large or small. Some included an entire thought, and others were fragmented parts of conversation such as a participant's response of "Yeah." Parts of large text units sometimes spanned several coding categories, some belonging to one category and some belonging to another. In the following chapter, a label, enclosed by a bracket contains the speaker's name, the context (either individual interview or focus group interview), and the text unit number assigned by the software program, following each text unit. Liberty with participants' quotes was taken to connect their thoughts even when they did not unfold with proximity in space and time. In other words, if a participant talked about a topic in the focus group interview and then again in the individual interview, I combined them. In these cases, I used an ellipsis, not to signal omission, but rather to signal a pause or lapse in time and/or setting. Labeling brackets that follow the quotes include complete references to the sources.

Brackets were also used to signify clarification of the participants' words, particularly in cases of pronouns lacking antecedents. For example, if a participant said "they" for "my parents," I used the later phrase in brackets to create clarity for the reader. Sometimes I made this adjustment based on the conversation taken as a whole

(contextual clues) and other times I did so after asking the speaker to clarify what he said.

Lastly, I edited extraneous comments of participants, but sparingly. In such instances, short affirmations by the speaker and interview questions were omitted. For example, the actual exchange between Jesus and myself [units 18-21] was as follows:

> Audrey : And he's a mechanic, right?
> Jesus: Yeah.
> Audrey: How would he react if you didn't want to be a mechanic?
> Jesus: I don't know. Probably like maybe a little disappointed or something.

This exchange was represented thusly:

> Although Jesus said that he had his doubts about working with his dad on a full-time basis, he had not considered careers other than auto mechanics partly because he was concerned about his reaction.
>
> I don't know. Probably [my father would act] like maybe a little disappointed or something.
> [Jesus, Individual Interview, 21]

Document Reviews

Analysis of data collected during document reviews of participants' ITPs was handled somewhat differently than interview data. These data were not integrated into the NUD*IST database for two reasons. First, the range of data that was collected was narrow. Student ITPs were similar; teachers used a master ITP from which to generate transitional goals for each student. Thus, because tracking nuances of meaning and shades of difference seemed unnecessary for this task, I used a spreadsheet program (Microsoft™ Excel 2001) to record the frequency of variables both within and across race/ethnic groups. Second, I transcribed the ITPs verbatim using a laptop computer,

creating tables of goals, objectives, dates, and checklists, all of which contained formatting that NUD*IST had difficulty categorizing. Sources for the presented data from document reviews are contained in the narrative analysis and the titles of the tables of data.

Observation Notes and Field Notes

Each time I entered the field to conduct research activities, from recruitment of teacher liaisons to observations of ITP meetings, I recorded what I observed and heard. I made every attempt to record comments verbatim, and described the context thoroughly. I jotted down phrases on paper while in the field, and then once by myself I typed my notes into my laptop. After recording observations, referred to herein as Observation Notes, I also created a duplicate file and interspersed my subjective reactions to what I had observed, calling the second file, Observation Field Notes. I labeled these data sources using a similar bracket system as the one described above. I used the title of the source, the date it was collected, the numbers of the lines of text, and the participant's identifying number.

Although I conducted seven observations, three of the students did not remain in the study. Therefore, an analysis of observations includes a total of four documents. This small amount of data did not require the use of NUD*IST. Instead, I looked for patterns of students participation and ITP procedures within in single observations and across all four. I did this manually.

The inclusion of my field notes as data sources is primarily limited to discussion in Chapter Five, where I attempted to provide a more complete look at the data, its context, and my interpretation, organized by overarching themes. Chapter Four contains analysis of data, organized first by source, and then by group comparison.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The purpose of this study was to explore student perceptions and behaviors of self-determination during postsecondary transition. A variety of data collection methods were used to gather data including interviews, observations, and document reviews. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the self-determination behaviors of CLD adolescents with LD?
2. How do CLD students perceive their own role and responsibilities regarding transition planning?
3. How do CLD students perceive the influence of their parents and teachers on the transition planning process?

The main data collection activity included focus group interviews and individual follow up interviews. The presentation of results included here is an analysis of major categories of text quotes and their significance, both across groups, and within groups. Because the question of whether students' racial/ethnic identities impacted either their behaviors or perceptions about self-determination was of interest to this study, this student characteristic is key to the analysis and the point from which any comparison or contrast stems. Chapter 5, then will contain a broad, holistic analysis that ties together participants' comments and interview participation, observations, and

document reviews, applying overarching themes that have emerged from the data and the contexts in which they were situated, as well as from my analysis and the perspectives that contextualize me as a researcher and instrument of this study.

Students Identified Goals in Need of Immediate Attention

Across groups, students identified several goals that could be described as immediate goals, or goals that were prerequisite to long-range objectives. Some of these short-range goals were repeatedly identified across groups, indicating that the more immediate objectives students were attempting to accomplish were foremost in their minds. Other short-range goals were reported by only one or two groups.

Graduating from High School

No participant identified completing high school as a sole terminal goal on his educational path; however, many said that this was their key focus for the immediate future, so that their long-range goals, such as enrolling in the local community college, were attainable. Also, many students considered receiving a high school diploma as both a terminal goal *and* a steppingstone. As a terminal goal, receiving a high school diploma epitomized success, and was an accomplishment that other family members or parents had not achieved. Michael, Martin, and Marshall all expressed this sentiment. For others, graduation was a minimal requirement for academic achievement. Ron explained that he had to graduate because if he did not, he would be the first in his

family to drop out. Forest said he needed to graduate from high school, "no matter what." Tony said it was unquestionably one of his more important goals.

> I do care. I want to graduate. I've been to these graduations for three years. I want to be able to walk up that ramp.
> [Tony, Individual Interview, 137]

The lines distinguishing graduation as a terminal goal from a requisite (steppingstone) goal were not distinct, however, because participants across all groups said they intended to continue their education after high school. Students articulated, in a broad way, what they needed to do to make graduation a reality. Ron, a senior, said:

> Because it's my last year and I've got to get out of there and the teacher has already told me, she was like, 'This is your last year. If you don't pass all of your classes this year you maybe have to stay until June to get an extra credit.' And I said, 'I can't do that.' And she was like, 'If you want to graduate with your class in May, you've got to come to all your classes and do all your work.' Because I need seven credits just to graduate…I just want to graduate high school so I won't be there.
> Ron, Individual Interview, 168, 308]

Several of the other short-range goals were identified as necessary steps to reaching long-range goals. These included attending class and completing schoolwork, working and saving money, and avoiding breaking school, home, or community rules and laws.

Completing Everyday School-Related Tasks

Only a few students, mostly European and African Americans, identified immediate steps to obtain credits and keep in line with graduation requirements. Trent's comment was typical.

> Pass the rest of my classes and get everything turned in on time.
> [Trent, Individual Interview, 123]

Saving Money

Several students spoke about needing money for college. Some talked about borrowing it (Joe said he would ask his dad for financial help) and others talked about working for it. DeShawn spoke about working to save money for college, as well as studying now so that he can be a better student in college.

> Studying, try to work to get enough money to go, and study a lot, so when I'll be able to take my tests I can pass. Basically, just to study so when I get there I'll know what to do and I won't fail.
> [DeShawn, Individual Interview, 10]

Michael, who said he needed to graduate early for similar reasons, was aware that his academic situation at school was precarious.

> So, I am going to try to catch up my credits. But if I do get all my credits by the recommended to get to college, then I will go to college.
> [Michael, Individual Interview, 16]

Avoiding Trouble

African Americans and European Americans talked about staying out of trouble to approach graduation more smoothly. Forest said he needed to maintain his probation orders and stay sober in order to meet his goals. Other students spoke on a more general level.

> What people need to do is to stay on the right track. If you're hanging out with a good crowd, people, you know, that's got your back and everything, stay with them. Don't just drop them because people are saying, "They're goody-goodies, come with the bad crowd." But also, don't do nothing really stupid. Don't go out to a

> party and get drunk, get stoned, be in a car, you're driving, you know, end up killing yourself. Just stay on the right track mostly…Get high grades in all the SATs.
> [Thomas, Individual Interview, 216, 218]

Students Set Wide Range of Postsecondary Goals

As participants revealed their long-range goals, there was little variation among race/ethnic groups. When participants articulated their dreams and hopes for the future, they talked mostly about their goals for employment. Students were asked to respond to the question, "Where do see yourself in five (or ten) years?" Without exception, participants began by talking about careers they intended to pursue. When responses were probed, most participants discussed postsecondary education options and goals. Students did not discuss goals in other transition domains such as interpersonal relationships or living arrangements unless those areas were addressed in specific questions, such as "Where do you see yourself living at that time?"

Careers

Participants in each group stated career goals that ranged in requisite skills and knowledge from college education to on-the-job-training. Some wanted to pursue professional careers, others wanted to pursue trades or skilled labor jobs, and still others were unsure about the types of jobs they wanted to explore. All participants, even those who said they were not sure what they would be doing in the future, stated at least one career interest. Many participants stated that they were interested in pursuing two or three ideas.

Of the three groups, African Americans most consistently picked professional careers. Both DeShawn and Martin said they wanted to be architects. Thomas wanted to be a professional basketball player; however, his backup plan was to be a marine biologist. Ron was the only African American who stated that he didn't "really know" what he wanted to do. When asked if he wanted to continue his position in the grocery business post-graduation and increase his hours to fulltime employment, Ron was unenthused.

> [Staying employed at the grocery] would be all right. [The grocery] is okay; it just gets boring after a while. Probably move to like [a pet shop] or something.
> [Ron, Individual Interview, 40]

Among European American and Latino participants who selected careers that required four-year degree programs were Earl, who mentioned architecture; Michael and Joe, who both wanted to be doctors; and Forest, Jaime, and Tony, who all mentioned careers in teaching or coaching.

> Seeing how the teacher can do their own way of teaching. They can be like a best friend. I'm going to try to be a math teacher or a music teacher, teach them how to sing, play the piano, show them what I know, and then put two and two together.
> [Tony, Individual Interview, 36]

Yet, these same groups of students were more likely to name careers that required less education than those selected by African American participants. While some of the careers, such as police officer, chef, or auto mechanic, required education or training beyond high school, these careers did not require a bachelor's degree. Jesus

wanted to be an auto mechanic, Tony and Ricky both mentioned becoming police officers, Marshall wanted to go into construction, and Earl and Trent were considering the military.

The most striking difference between groups was the intent on the part of African Americans to develop professional careers that required more than two years of college education. Comparison between groups is difficult, however, because students were not limited in the number of options they identified. Also, participants did not differentiate between options they had been seriously considering and planning to pursue, and options that represented more of a fleeting fancy or "pipe dream." As analysis of the extent to which plans were developed will reveal, however, students did make these distinctions. For example, Martin's plan to pursue architecture and design was far more developed than his plan to become a professional wrestler. When taken as a whole, the African American group expressed more interest in professional careers than their European American and Latino peers.

Postsecondary Education

Much of the discussion about postsecondary education was closely related to postsecondary employment. No participant said they wanted to go to college for the purpose of exploring available careers or fields of study. Participants identified the types of careers they wanted and then spoke to the educational requirements. Across races/ethnicities, participants discussed their plans to continue their education after high

school. All participants, including those who expressed concern that higher education might prove too difficult for them, discussed the possibility of attending college. Most of the students did not plan to attend a four-year university immediately after high school. In fact, although many students intended to pursue careers in fields such as architecture and education, which require a minimum of a bachelor's degree, they indicated that they would begin their postsecondary education at the local community college, City Community College (CCC). Often students did not explicitly state their rationale for planning to attend a community college prior to attending a university.

> I want to be like a kid's doctor, you know. Help kids out. And, to get there, I was thinking about going to CCC, and transfer to a college. And, after college, go to med school and all that.
> [Michael, Individual Interview, 10]

Reasons for planning to attend the local community college, when given, varied. Several students, across groups, worried about the difficulty of college-level work. Although Earl wanted to become an architect, his postsecondary educational goals were impacted by his uncertainty that he could be a successful college student. He thought a preliminary step would be to attend a local community college.

> I don't know. Because college, I really don't think I am good for college. The work [in high school] is too hard.
> [Earl, Individual Interview, 102, 108]

Ron agreed that college work might exceed his ability.

> I'll probably have a job but I don't know about after, going to college…Because it's still college, and high school is hard and all the teachers say college is going to be harder than high school.
> [Ron, Focus Group, 9, 245]

Jesus, a junior, was planning on attending CCC. Nevertheless, he was interested in finding out more about other mechanics programs around the state.

> I don't know-there's a little college like in [the western part of the state] or something that's for mechanics and stuff.
> [Jesus, Focus Group, 286]

Furthermore, Forest's math teacher, with whom he maintained a close relationship, advised him to start at the local community college.

> [My math teacher] thinks I should start out at CCC for a little while, because he said that will really help me with the basics a lot at first, and he said just transfer to a college that I want.
> [Forest, Individual Interview, 30]

Other teachers also advised students to go the local community college, but they may not have been forthcoming with a reason.

> When [the teachers] tell me like what college I wanted to go to. When I said I wanted to go to this other college, but they said it would take a lot of money and they prefer me just to go to CCC.
> [Tony, Individual Interview, 15]

When European American participants did mention postsecondary education other than CCC, they were vague about their intentions, not mentioning specific campuses or programs. Like Earl, Sam was considering the same local community college but he did not give any definitive reason for selecting this school. Marshall and Joe both discussed college in broad terms, never specifying what type of program or campus they would like to attend.

Forest was the only European American participant to talk about pursuing educational programs typically associated with four-year universities without directly associating the academic fields of study with careers. His interests were Latin, calculus, and physics. He was not completely dedicated to pursuing a college degree, however, because he thought he might be able to succeed as a business owner without attending college, and because his goals related to skateboarding were his priority.

> I don't know yet. It depends. If everything works out the easy way then no, I'd do it later on in life. But if, I guess, the people that want to help me can't really do too much, then I guess I'm just going to have to go to college and just go for it.
> [Forest, Individual Interview, 86]

African American participants differentiated themselves from the other participants in this study by stating intentions to attend specific four-year postsecondary educational institutions. While European Americans and Latinos all focused on community college or military training, African American participants talked about attending specialized institutes for art and design, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, large public universities, and prestigious private universities. Students mentioned four-year institutions in addition to, rather than instead of, the local community college option.

> I see myself in college. My major might be like Art and Design. Because I already, like [the state's main university] is sending me paper work and stuff.
> [Martin, Focus Group, 5]

> Because right now I'm trying to get into CCC. And I'm trying to transfer. I want to go to [a state university], so I don't know.
> [DeShawn, Focus Group, 3]

Military Service

Although members of each group said that their parents or other family members had presented the option of military service, only European Americans said that they were considering this option. Trent's desire to work with technology was couched in his plan for a military career. He wanted a challenge and he was attracted to high-risk positions in the military. He said he figured he would develop job skills with technology during his service.

> Para-rescue was like the hardest thing in the Air Force that you can do, so that's why I want to do that…I just like being challenged. I don't like being bored and not doing anything. I have to have something exciting. That's why I like going rock-climbing and stuff like that.
> [Trent, Individual Interview, 6, 11]

This plan would require Trent to explore options for postsecondary education within the military. He wanted to be competitive enough to qualify for para-rescue training in the Air Force, so he was considering the Air Force Academy.

> Well, one, you don't start out as a grunt, which means you don't have to do really hard work. You don't have to basically go through boot camp and all that. That way when you graduate from the Air Force I start out as an officer instead of a sergeant or something like that in para-rescue. So I start up higher, which means higher pay and stuff.
> [Trent, Individual Interview, 30]

African American and Latino participants who had considered the military were leaning toward other options. Ricky, Thomas, and Ron had considered the military

because their parents or extended family members introduced the option, but none wanted to pursue it. Ricky's father gave him literature about enlisting in the navy and Ricky had decided he did not want to do that. He felt comfortable being honest about that with his father.

> He'll probably go with me because I don't want to do that. He'll probably agree with my decision.
> [Ricky, Individual Interview, 55]

At one point Ron's mother spoke to a recruiter from a branch of the military and made an interview appointment for Ron.

> I don't want to think about that one…[my mother] almost won on that one. I cancelled it though. I was like, 'I don't want to go. I changed my mind.' She was like, 'Why? Did you get scared?' I was like, 'No, I don't know what kind of questions they're going to ask me there.' She was like, Okay, well just cancel it.'
> [Ron, Individual Interview, 229, 231]

Athletics

Other postsecondary goals involved becoming collegiate and/or professional athletes. No European American participant discussed this option. Athletic careers mentioned were basketball (Ron and Thomas), professional wrestling (Martin and Tony) and soccer (Jaime).

Thomas seemed to be the most serious in his pursuit of an athletic career, consistently mentioning his determination to pursue sports and academics and to select a college based primarily on the opportunity to play college ball.

> My major will probably be marine biology and hopefully get drafted into the NBA, or if that doesn't go right I'll always have that major to be marine biology…That's my goal, to get to Duke. But say if I go to California, some college in California. It would be like, 'Hey, I'm still playing basketball.' It don't matter where really. But you want to shoot for your goal… They might cut you off the team, but you know, you've got to try your hardest to stay on the team. If they cut you off, talk to the coach. 'Can I do something else so I can still be on the team?' Even if you're going to throw me to a water boy position, hey, I'm still on the basketball team. Get my books better and get back on the team later.
> [Thomas, Individual Interview, 16, 218]

Like Tony, Jaime thought about becoming a teacher but his first choice was to pursue a career in soccer. He was the only Latino in this study to seriously consider a career as a professional athlete. Tony said that an athletic career as a professional wrestler appealed to him, but he did not have a developed plan to pursue the goal, nor the support of his mother and grandmother.

> Well, when I told them about becoming a WWE wrestler they say that these guys are too big. You can't possibly do that…
> [Tony, Individual Interview, 60]

Independent Living

Participants across groups said that they would eventually like to live on their own but Latino students said that they would like to live at home immediately following high school, for various reasons. Several of the young men noted that living away from their families would require an adjustment.

> Well, I was thinking that after I get my career and if I save enough and get my own apartment-but not too far away. I want my mom to know where I live at.
> [Tony, Individual Interview, 119]

> To get used to it? Being by myself. Like now, I am used to being with my parents, but I would have to get used to being by myself.
> [Jaime, Individual Interview, 55]

> My dad doesn't really care. My dad said I could stay with him until I get some more money and find my own house or something. I am pretty sure I could find an apartment myself.
> [Ricky, Individual Interview, 290]

African American and European American participants said they wanted to move out on their own after graduation. Participants from these two groups who stated exceptions to this plan included Ron, Joe, and Sam. They identified the need to save money before going out on their own.

> First, like me, my mom is going to, for a while, for a couple of months, I'll be getting all my money to save up a little bit. And then, until I get enough money for a car, and then after that, I am not going to take all the money. I am going to be giving some of it to my mom to kind of stay there. I already have a job and I could but she is still allowing me to stay there. So, that is what I would do. Kind of help them learn what it is going to be like.
> [Sam, Individual Interview, 116]

> I think I'd stay at home for a while and just get a full-time job until I get on my feet. And probably try to move out…Like if I moved out I would like for my mom to make the decision for me so she'll talk me out of it. 'You'll waste your money on this.' So I'll stay with her for a couple of years.
> [Ron, Focus Group, 233, 390]

Martin, on the other hand, said that if he were graduating this year, he would already be looking for a place. Forest also wanted to live independently following high school. He had tentative plans to live with a friend who already owned a house as the result of a death in the family. This, however, would require a move to the West Coast.

> [My best friend's] grandma gave him a house in California-a beach house-so like when he turns 18 he wants to move down there, because I'm a year older than him. So we're just waiting for that. That will be cool.
> [Forest, Individual Interview, 84]

DeShawn had maintained his own place for the past two years, but he said that although he had been able to support himself, he found it difficult. His comments about his living arrangements were made sparingly and he alluded to the fact that he considered this topic to be one about which he was uncomfortable sharing.

> … stay at home as long as possible because you don't have to worry about all the responsibility; the only thing you have to worry about is school…your chores at home and that's it. But other than that, everything else is peaches and cream. All you've got to do is worry about managing yourself and getting in school and graduating and taking it that far.
> [DeShawn, Individual Interview, 46]

Discussions about living arrangements were generally limited to location (e.g., stay at home or get a place of my own). In terms of planning for transitional domains that involved daily living skills, participants across race/ethnicity had little to say. Students did not reveal consideration for chores and responsibilities that accompany adulthood (e.g., laundry, cooking, using transportation), unless prompted, and even then discussion was short. Some of the students' ideas about these daily living transition domains were addressed when the groups brainstormed about what components of adult life should be included on the ITP.

Family and Filial Duty

During the focus group interviews, African Americans and Latinos brought up the topic of raising families but European American participants did not address the demands of becoming parents. Tony was the only Latino participant who said that he could see himself in the role of parent when he dreamed of the future. As Tony revealed this during the focus group interview, Ricky responded how he felt about becoming a parent.

> Hopefully not in 20 years.
> [Ricky, Focus Group, 22]

Ron said he had not considered the possibility of having his own family while DeShawn addressed his ambivalence on the subject.

> Me, I just-I don't know. If I do this I'll have kids later on. I'm going to be a good parent. Like right now, I don't get along with my parents too much. I want my kids to get along with me, to be able to come to me for anything.
> [DeShawn, Focus Group, 36]

For other participants from all groups, the word "family" brought to mind responsibilities and indebtedness to existing family members in addition to raising nuclear families. Martin said that he thought of supporting his younger sister, whose father "ran off on her when she was about five. She hasn't seen him. She's 14 now" [Focus Group, 34]. Thomas also expressed a sense of filial duty.

> Well, hopefully when we get all this war done and everything-I want to travel the world at some point in my life, see the sights, raise a family, take care of my parents when they get older, help my sister and my two little brothers out.
> [Individual Interview, 44]

Two of the Latino participants specifically mentioned their goals for fulfilling their responsibilities as family members. Jaime said that he would defer to his brothers if they needed him to join the family business and stay at home. He also mentioned that he might need to stay home and help his younger brothers "with school." Michael also mentioned helping out his mother and younger siblings through monetary support and leading by example.

> Make sure I do my work and get a good job so I can have money to support my family … To support my family and to show examples of what your life should be like.
> [Michael, Individual Interview, 145, 153]

Forest also frequently situated his ongoing goal of repaying his grandmother for the love and support she had provided him in the midst of other goals.

> Pass high school, get off probation and this time when I get off, stay sober. Get a job. Try to give back some help to my grandma, because she's done a whole bunch for me… Probably all those because those aren't too big of goals. I need to graduate from high school no matter what, and I need a job no matter what. I owe a lot of, I guess, dedication from my grandma. Because she's really sick right now and she's done so much for me. So it would just be nice to pay her back.
> [Forest, Individual Interview, 58, 60]

Recreation

European Americans and Latinos both brought up the idea that they would like to travel recreationally when they became adults. Participants from both groups said they would like to travel within and outside of the United States.

> Maybe like travel. I really haven't been anywhere else except [the southern United States], so...
> [Marshall, Individual Interview, 96]

Jaime identified a desire to "discover the world" by traveling and Ricky said that he too would like to travel.

> I'd probably go to Las Vegas and blow it all.
> [Ricky, Focus Group, 43]

Other recreational activities participants said they would like to continue included playing league soccer, going to the track, play in a band, and socializing with friends. African Americans did not talk about recreational opportunities.

Plans to Reach Goals Ranged from Nonexistent to Works in Progress

Although every participant in the study did name at least one postsecondary goal (usually career-related), not everyone had actually considered the goal to the extent that they had developed plans of action. Also, the same participant may have devoted different quantity/quality of planning efforts toward separate goals.

No Plans Yet

Evidence that some students had not defined and taken action toward their goals was apparent in a number of scenarios. Sometimes students said they had not thought about the topic.

> Not really. This is like the first time.
> [Trent, Focus Group, 48]

> I don't know. I haven't gotten that far yet.
> [Earl, Individual Interview, 114]

During the focus group discussion, Joe seemed flustered when he first thought about his dreams for the future.

> Just thinking what everybody else is thinking, and I don't know what to do…
> [Joe, Focus Group, 18]

Soon after this comment, however, he stated his goal of becoming a doctor.

Contributing to the lack of planning, seemed to be the general consensus that planning did not need to occur until students were seniors, or had graduated.

> Like if I just left high school and just head straight to CCC and just talking to them and getting all the information I can. And then see how far I get.
> [Tony, Focus Group, 288]

Although Jaime was a senior, he had not yet asked his brothers whether they wanted him to join the family business or pursue a career in professional soccer. This was an indication that this important step, as defined by the participant, had not yet been taken. Perhaps this was a result of conceptualizing the transition planning time frame as being limited to the time following graduation.

At other times, students demonstrated a lack of planning when their goals and plans were based on glamorous images and very little information about the goal being pursued. For example, Tony stated plans for becoming a teacher were more reality-based and somewhat more developed than were his plans to have a career as a police officer.

> Well, from watching a lot of Cops, America's Most Wanted. Seeing what they do-not just the police chases, but they also get the man, and seeing what's around us every time I want to help to stop it myself.
> [Tony, Individual Interview, 176]

More evidence that students had not yet developed plans to meet their stated goals sometimes emerged when they described career goals using incorrect vocabulary and factual information. Michael's notions about the demands of college seemed underdeveloped. He said he had not discussed his plans with his teachers and did not know what was required to study medicine. He referred to getting his masters degree at the local community college and he referenced this in the context of studying to be a doctor.

> If I go to CCC, it will probably be like half days, and the rest of the day I can just skateboard and all that.
> [Michael, Individual Interview, 62]

Joe was confused as to whether or not he would be able to begin preparation for medical school in high school or postsecondary settings. He also seemed to be unfamiliar with the term "medical school."

> I think probably go to health or maybe that doctor school. But there's no like doctor school here…Like high school?
> [Joe, Individual Interview, 61]

Lastly, some students said that although they had thought about setting future goals and planning for them, they were unable to devise a plan that sounded good. Ron had the most difficulty describing his vision of himself after high school. He repeatedly stated that he did not know what he wanted to do in terms of employment and that he was unsure whether he should pursue a college education. Furthermore, he indicated that he did not think or worry about the future much.

Marshall seemed to have the least amount of experience talking about the subject, stating that he either did not know what his plans were, or he did not have any plans at all. As the individual interview, the only one in which he participated, continued, he was able to provide some information but it was consistently limited.

A Continuum of Plan Development

Students described plans in different stages of development. Plans could be located on a continuum ranging from rudimentary to advanced stages of development. These stages of plan development were found across groups, and no discernable pattern based on race/ethnicity resulted from locating individuals' plans on the continuum. The loose categorization for stages of plan development is as follows:

1. Rudimentary Stage: Planning for the future was considered important and beneficial, yet no clear goal for which to develop a plan of action had been identified.

2. Basic Stage: Goal(s) had been broadly or vaguely defined but remained in the ideation stage, a plan of action was not articulated. Requisite skills and knowledge for goal attainment remained unknown or underdeveloped.
3. Intermediate Stage: Goals reflected knowledge of self; understanding of the demands of goal attainment was demonstrated. Some steps or actions, either immediate or long-range, were included in the plan.
4. Advanced Stage: Goal is articulated in some detail; initial steps in plan have been identified and/or some action taken.

Locating the various plans students shared during the interviews along this continuum was complicated because each student contributed several goals and discussions of plans were not always distinct. For example, DeShawn's plan to attend art school and pursue a degree in architecture would fall along the continuum at the Intermediate Stage because he based this decision on his knowledge of his strengths and weaknesses. His plans to attend college, whatever the program, however, were actually more developed. He had collected information about various schools, made visits to the local community college, and he said he was preparing for the SAT, thus categorizing that plan in the Advanced Stage.

Analysis of participants' plans included all goals and respective plans shared by each participant. Results from identifying these plans on a continuum illustrate that the

vast majority of plans fall along the continuum in the stages of Basic or Semi-Developed. Few students had such underdeveloped plans that they were categorized as Rudimentary, and, similarly, few plans were seen as Advanced.

Rudimentary Stage. Some students had a tough time identifying a goal that they wanted to pursue in enough detail that they could actually start to take action and begin to make the dream become a reality. Although Ron struggled with goal setting and planning activities, he said that he thought planning for adulthood was an important activity. He said he intended to speak to a counselor at SHS to discuss future plans, but he just kept forgetting to stop by her office.

Earl had difficulty articulating future goals, saying that he did not know what he wanted to do. Eventually he said he would like to be "either an architect or a soldier." He appeared to have an overly simplistic view of a career in the military, basing his knowledge on anecdotes from his uncles.

> Well, the Navy is really easy and you get to sail on ships and everything. The Army-that's going to be the hard one. You have to march 10 to 20 hours a day. [My uncles] told me about the military, like when you go into battle. The Marines, they're the first ones that go into battle. He calls them the 'suicide squad.' And then the second ones are the Army, and third is Air Force, and then Navy. Because Air Force-out of all of them Air Force is the best. You get to sleep in a hotel and everything.
> [Earl, Individual Interview, 287]

Like Trent, he decided not to join the ROTC, but for different reasons. To do so would have precluded him from participating in a vocational program called On the Job Training (OJT).

Sam associated not planning with failing but when it came to defining goals and taking steps toward achieving them, Sam resisted. He said he did not enjoy planning and avoided the topic with adults. He also deemed the process too time-consuming.

> Because you are not always going to get what you want, have something to fall back on…[You need to know] How you're going to go about doing it. You may just go out thinking you're going to do this so easily and then when it finally comes true you're just like, 'I haven't planned for this,' and it blows up all in your face. You realize that you have to go back to square one.
> [Sam, Focus Group, 210, Individual Interview, 166]

Basic Stage. Participants had lots of ideas about the careers they wanted to pursue but they rarely articulated specific details about these goals, even when probed. Jaime had lots of experience on the soccer field and considered the idea of becoming a coach and pursuing that goal at the local community college. He said he did not know if they offered coaching courses or if he would even want to coach soccer.

Forest's plan to become an entrepreneur was rich in ideas, yet underdeveloped. Although he did have experience and knowledge in the area of skateboarding, he had ideas about starting a business designing and selling skateboards and related equipment or owning and managing a skate park. He liked to think about this topic, however, and shared his plan with adults. He repeatedly said that he thought planning was essential. Although he said a back-up plan was necessary, he believed it was possible for his plan to come together by luck or by chance, therefore relieving him of the need to attend college.

> Because I may not even have to take any business classes if I get to know the right people. I may not even have to go to college. I really want to for some things, but that'll be probably later on if everything kind of just falls into my lap, I guess. Because that's pretty much what happened to that other dude with that skateboard company and he was, I guess, wanting to help me have that dream, the same thing that happened to him. He says it's great.
> [Forest, Individual Interview, 56]

Some goals for the future that fell along the continuum at the Basic Stage were not career-related. Forest was waiting for a friend to graduate so they could move to California. This dream had yet to be fleshed out, however, so details such as when and how the move would take place were sparse. Ron and Martin both mentioned their desire to play sports after high school. Yet neither was currently involved in school sports, nor did either seem to know how to pursue competitive sports recreationally or professionally. Although Ron said that losing basketball games made him want to practice harder, he also said he was not on the basketball team at SHS because, "They lose too much."

Plans to enroll in postsecondary educational settings were also categorized in the Basic Stage because key issues, such as application procedures and how to seek services for students with disabilities in postsecondary settings were not known. Generally, plans reflected students' lack of knowledge about student services and their rights and responsibilities as provided for by the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990). For example, DeShawn could identify what he need as a learner, but he was

unaware of the procedure to get assistance in college. He said he and his special education case manager had not discussed this yet.

> Visual. I have to see it...I don't know. Probably just to show [college professors] [my individual learning needs]. Speaking to them, just telling them, like I say, actions speak better than words.
> [DeShawn, Individual Interview, 172, 174]

Forest and Ron said that they were concerned about whether current academic difficulties would impact their pursuit of postsecondary education, but did not mention what type of help they thought they would need. Although Thomas and Martin talked about going to college quite a bit, they did not discuss the need for receiving academic assistance in postsecondary educational settings.

In discussing the steps to enter the community college programs, Jaime, a senior, said he would first take "tests."

> And then after that, show them that I really wanted it.
> [Jaime, Individual Interview, 150]

Although Jesus said that he did think he would need academic supports in a postsecondary setting, he said he did not know how to arrange them. He said he thought he could get the information from one of his current teachers and that he would like to use similar accommodations in the community college setting.

Intermediate Stage. Many of the students based their goals, in particular career goals, on knowledge of their own strengths. Although plans at this stage may not have been developed into a detailed, sequential group of actions, participants had made some effort to take action toward the goal. For example, students may have tried to gather

facts about the requisites or benefits of the career they wanted to pursue. Or participants had established connections with people who could offer them inside information or help getting a job or getting admitted to an academic or job training program.

Trent had given consideration to some of the requirements and demands of a military career. He inquired with friends in the military regarding what type of training he would encounter.

> [My friend] talked to some para-rescue people and I was seeing how hard it would be. You've got to spend a couple of weeks by yourself in the jungle with whatever you have on your body. And do that in the dessert.
> [Trent, Focus Group, 67]

He had also spoken to his aunt and determined that satisfactory grades on his high school transcript were a likely prerequisite to being accepted in the Air Force Academy.

> Make all your grades, because like only a few people can go. It's a really hard school to get into. I mean the government chooses who goes to this school. It's not like there's a superintendent or something like that.
> [Trent, Focus Group, 212]

Still, whether Trent was realistically considering the steps he would have to take to reach his goal was unclear. He did not join extracurricular clubs, such as ROTC, related to military careers. He said that this would be unimportant on an application.

> Actually, my aunt says they don't look at that. She went to the Air Force Academy and they don't look at that. They don't care because mainly what they're doing is looking at your grades and seeing how well you did in school, how good you were at cooperating with orders and stuff like that.
> [Trent, Individual Interview, 60]

While Tony's plan to become a teacher still needed to be worked out, his intentions of attending the local community college were in the Intermediate Stage. Tony said that he heard that the community college had some of the supports he needed. He and his aunt, who had been a student there, had discussed this.

> [We've talked about] What did you do there? Did they have stuff for my needs? Also how long I'll be there for my classes-like if I stay there long, like seven or six years-or I keep working hard and I just do four years. [inaudible] being ready for that.
> [Tony, Individual Interview, 9]

Still, his idea that he could spend six or seven years pursuing an associate's degree, as well as subsequent comments about seeking services for students with disabilities is an indication he needed more information.

> [My teachers] only told me that at [the local community college] they do have what I have but I just don't know if they do exactly what they do here.
> [Tony, Individual Interview, 29]

When asked what he would do if he needed extra help he said, "Just raise my hand."

And although Thomas had been on the SHS basketball team from time to time, he also seemed unclear on how to pursue a career in sports. His plans for becoming an athlete seemed to straddle the Basic and Semi-Developed Stages. He did participate in sports, he did seek the support of his parents in the pursuit of this goal, and he did practice his skills. Yet, realistic methods for seeking information on exactly how to pursue this, as well as his postsecondary educational goal, may have been difficult for him to identify.

> Probably [ask] Magic Johnson to help me out with my basketball and my marine biologist career. I know Magic probably knows a little bit about marine biology. But definitely he knows a lot about basketball. He could tell me to do this, get on the coach's good side, and everything. But also you can also ask a football player. That's also my goal, too. Basketball/football. That's how I started off, playing both. But you could really ask anybody.
> [Thomas, Individual Interview,]

Advanced Stage. Few plans fell into this category of development, but some did qualify because students had not only articulated the steps they needed to follow, action had been taken. For example, as a group, African American students' plans to attend college seemed to be considered in some detail. Each of the three young men who had dreams to attend college had considered the location of postsecondary institutions in their planning strategy, and each said that staying close to home and in-state was a priority. DeShawn said he had been preparing for SATs and he had considered which teachers might be best to ask for letters of recommendation. Martin had requested informational brochures and made campus visits, and Thomas attended college night at SHS.

Nevertheless, students' understanding of the application process was in the beginning stages. DeShawn, Thomas, and Martin had all taken action to find literature on colleges, and in DeShawn's case, financial aid. DeShawn and Thomas mentioned SAT preparation, but specific application requirements and procedures were yet to be completed. Still, DeShawn, a senior, did have application materials in his possession and said he was trying to find time to read over them. Thomas and Martin, juniors, had

only read introductory materials describing available college programs. As Martin put it, he had "no idea" about the application process.

None of the students' plans could have been considered sophisticated or complex. Multiple postsecondary goals were not identified and addressed, nor were a variety of options within one domain or a variety of postsecondary domains; steps toward goal attainment had generally not been taken.

Relationships and Experiences Informed Goals and Plans

Students' goals and their plans to reach them were not formed in isolation. Rather, students selected transition goals and developed plans that were informed by their experiences in various settings, including home, community, school, and work (if they had employment experiences). Plans were also informed by the relationships students maintained with adults and peers. For example, many participants mentioned parents and extended family members, and to a much lesser extent, teachers who influenced their decisions when it came to transition planning. Across groups, participants mentioned the significance of each type of stimuli.

The importance of both life experiences and relationships with adults followed no discernible pattern based on the race/ethnicity of participant; however, European American participants had fewer work-related experiences and less vocational training than did their African American and Latino peers.

Relationships Connected Students and Their Dreams

Participants across groups drew attention to the influence of interpersonal relationships on their goal setting, planning, and attainment during the transition planning process. Key people in students' lives included parents and guardians, immediate and extended family members, teachers and mentors, and friends.

Parents/Guardians. Participants volunteered a variety of information about their home lives and relationships with parents/guardians and other family members. Across groups, family structures included families headed by single parents (both mothers and fathers), those headed by parents and stepparents, and those headed by married parents. All participants lived at home with at least one parent except DeShawn and Forest. DeShawn maintained an independent household with his girlfriend, but revealed few details about this arrangement. Although DeShawn was 18, the school treated his parents as his legal guardians. Forest lived with his grandmother, who was his legal guardian. His mother intermittently lived with them.

Sometimes parents/guardians noticed their children's strengths or talents and sparked ideas for students to pursue. Thomas said that his parents were the ones who originally got him to try out for a basketball team, and they continued to believe in his athletic talent.

> When I was little, … one of [my dad's] co-workers was a coach of a basketball team. My dad and my mom said, 'Thomas, maybe you should try out.' So I tried out and got the team, first place, we didn't lose any games.
> [Individual Interview, 22]

When asked how they would react to hearing him state his career goal as a professional athlete, Thomas said:

> Probably both of my parents would probably giggle or something like that. They would say, 'Thomas's been talking about signing a basketball career up in Duke; hopefully [he'll] get drafted to the Sixers.'
> [Individual Interview, 70]

Although DeShawn's father was initially skeptical that his son could complete the task (a drawing), his ultimate approval of the final product seems to fuel DeShawn's desire to attain his goal of becoming an architect.

> I always drew stuff and my daddy…He's the pastor of a church and he wants a new church. He was telling me that he had to pay this man so much money and he couldn't pay it because it was so much to draw it. So I was like, 'I'll draw it for you if you want.' He didn't think I could do it. So I had drew one and he was like, 'That's good.' So it kind of made me happy, so I was like, 'I can do this.'
> [DeShawn, Individual Interview, 140]

Frequently, parents/guardians connected the strengths they saw in their children to career options. For example, in middle school, Earl's parents encouraged his creativity and interest in building design.

Jaime's parents support his athletic endeavors by attending his games. Jesus' father noticed that his son had the ability to become a good mechanic. He encouraged his pursuit of this career by talking to him and taking him to his auto mechanic's shop on weekends.

> He is always talking to me about cars and stuff…He's always teaching me new things.
> [Jesus, Individual Interview, 115, Focus Group 312]

> [My mother and father] almost go to all of my games. They know the way I play. They had asked me if I wanted to be a soccer player and I said, 'Yeah.'
> [Jaime, Focus Group, 71]

Sam, who said that he had been helping prepare meals since he was very young, said that his mom tries to provide information about food-related careers.

> She tries to help me as much as she can. Like she'll go and look up [culinary arts] programs for me. And she'll be like, 'Oh, here is some paper I got off the internet-why don't you read it.'
> [Sam, Individual Interview, 134]

Parents/guardians also modeled careers for their children, which continued to inform the participants' goal setting and planning. This role was more commonly discussed by European American and Latino participants. Jesus' father was a mechanic, which is what he wanted to do. Jaime's father was in the contracting business, which he considered joining. Although Trent indicated that he and his parents were not getting along, he still mentioned following their examples as he chose his career path.

> I don't know-obviously I've known about the Air Force for a while because everybody in my family has been in the Air Force … I'm good with technology; I always have been. My mom works [in the high tech industry]; my dad used to work [in the high tech industry].
> [Trent, Individual Interview, 6]

Joe was ambiguous about going into his father's business. He said he did think about it and he clearly felt admiration toward his father because of the accomplishments he made. Based on this, Joe felt that his dad could help him reach his goals.

> I would go to my dad. My dad's in business. He worked hisself from minimum wage to over minimum wage, and then they said that he was good enough to start his own, and then he started his own, and now he owns a company.
> [Joe, Focus Group, 322]

But sometimes parents, as in this case, discussed the idea that their children should *not* follow in their footsteps because of hardship. Joe's dad advised him to pursue something outside of his small business.

> My dad, I told him maybe I could have the business and then he said that, 'Son, you don't want this business. This business is too hard.' And then I was like, 'Okay.'
> [Joe, Individual Interview, 17]

Students also set goals and made plans in response to parent/guardian expectations. Often they said that they wanted to keep trying to meet the expectations of their parents. They way parents communicated those expectations did seem to differ by group, but at times parents from each group used diverse strategies to shape their children's futures through expectation.

When asked how they knew what their parents expected of them, African American participants indicated that their parents have simply told them during conversations about the future what was expected of them. As Martin said, "[My mom] just flat out tells me" and he knew that ultimately, she wanted him to go to college [Individual Interview, 95].

> My sister, she's already in college, like they motivated her. They're like, 'Well, you're going to have to follow in your sister's footsteps. You can go to college. We want you to go to college to have a higher education so you'll get like a better job. You can be like working at [a computer manufacturer] or something.'
> [Thomas, Individual Interview, 102]

> Going to college. That's what [my mom] wants me to do. I told her I'd think about it.
> [Ron, Individual Interview, 241]

> My dad, when we talk about that, he's pushing me to go [go to college] more. Instead of me just going off, he'll push me more to go do it. He'll like make sure I [apply].
> [DeShawn, Individual Interview, 26]

Another supportive role students associated with their parents during transition planning was that of sounding board. In this role, parents questioned their children and conversed with them, rather than explicitly stating their expectations.

> Mainly the only question [my parents] ask is if I'm planning on going to college.
> [Trent, Individual Interview, 26]

> [My mother] asks me [about my plans for the future] all the time. I'm like, 'I don't know.' She says, 'Well, you need to start thinking.' By 11th grade she started asking me that. She's like, 'Well, you need to start thinking about it.' I was like, 'I am thinking; I just don't have no idea yet.'
> [Ron, Individual Interview, 23]

Parents communicating expectations in broad terms such as the pursuit of dreams, or the drive to be happy, was more commonly reported by Latino participants. Parents' expectations of students were open and revealed their desire for their sons to fulfill their own dreams.

> For me it's going to be spread your wings and fly and see what the world offers you. Just be careful. Because my mother knows I'm responsible.
> [Tony, Focus Group, 324]

> My dad likes me being a cop. I want to be a cop myself but I think my dad also wants me to be a cop. And my mom does, too. ... I just say that I want to be it and they say, 'That's good, I should be that.'
> [Ricky, Focus Group, 61, 63]

While African American participants gave more examples of how their parents shared their expectations of their sons' enrollment in college, European American and Latino parents participants described the expectation of their parents in the realm of immediate goals including passing course work and high school graduation.

> My parents expect me to make good grades-the better the grades the better they are proud of me.
> [Joe, Individual Interview, 117]

> Yeah, [my grandmother] nags at me a lot to do my work.
> [Forest, Individual Interview, 66]

Jesus and Jaime, and all other Latino participants could think of specific incidents when they had conversations about what their parents/guardians expected of them.

> They just pretty much tell me to do my work and try to pass so that I can go to [college], because they didn't. They want me to … get a better life.
> [Michael, Individual Interview, 141, 143]

> To go to school, to keep trying, put a lot of effort into it.
> [Jaime, Focus Group, 317]

> Like every time I am [at my father's], he gives me a two-hour lecture about what I should do and stuff. Like I should finish high school and everything. A big old lecture.
> [Ricky, Individual Interview, 44]

> …my mom is always telling me like when I get out of the house I will find a good job and stuff like that. That I am going to need to support myself, stuff like that.
> [Jesus, Individual Interview, 149]

Parent/guardian expectations of transition plans were not always limited to careers and postsecondary educational issues. European Americans and Latinos both discussed their parents'/guardians' expectations regarding their living arrangements after high school which ranged in levels of independence, and informed their goals and plans in this area. Sam said his mom would offer some support until he gets on his feet, but he knows the support has limits.

> Because [my mother] doesn't want her son to be some kind of bum. She wants me to be able to leave her house so she doesn't have to worry about me so much. She's trying to make sure that I'm set in my goals…She'll be like, 'No, you've got to pay.' I know it'll be cheap. It'll be a lot cheaper than getting a place in [this city].
> [Sam, Individual Interview, 134, 292]

> Get out of the house, get me a job, I already got one. Pretty much the main thing is get a house, an apartment or something, get out of the house, get a car or something. Those are the main things … [They say] 'When you turn eighteen, you are getting out.'
> [Earl, Individual Interview, 92]

> My dad doesn't really care. My dad said I could stay with him until I get some more money and find my own house or something. I am pretty sure I could find an apartment myself.
> [Ricky, Individual Interview, 290]

> They expect me to live by myself…Not right away, but I need to be by myself, too.
> [Jaime, Individual Interview, 59, 61]

Another parental role participants said their parents/guardians filled during transition planning was that of supporter. Across groups participants said

parents'/guardians' affirmations fueled their desire to set and take action toward their goals. African American participants emphasized the importance of this type of caring more than the other groups, but no group failed to mention its significance.

> …[my grandmother's] a really sweet and she backs me up on whatever it is I talk to her about. She thinks [my skate park plan] sounds pretty good too. She said if she was a skateboarder she'd want to skate at my parks … She always tells me that I have so much more potential than she did. She says I'm probably smarter than she is right now. I don't know-she's just never really criticized me on my dreams. She's always backing me up to just go for it.
> [Forest, Individual Interview, 62, 64]

> [My mother] understands about what I want to do. I just know she does because her and I get along real well…She talks to me. And I talk to her about it too. Like, last I was talking to her, she told me that to keep following my dreams and do what I want to be.
> [Jaime, Individual Interview, 96, 102]

African American participants, who contributed most heavily to this category, made explicit references to the emotional support parents offered them, often emphasizing the importance of this support and the comfort and self-confidence that resulted. Emotional support was an expression of "care and love" and included parents' expressing confidence and belief that their sons could accomplish their goals, as well as "just being there" when they were needed most.

> Like when I call him and talk to [my father] he says, 'Do what you can. Don't give up. Keep going.'
> [DeShawn, Focus Group, 366]

> Like if I had to do something, [my mother's] behind me all the way. She's always there.
> [Martin, Individual Interview, 183]

> That's like a good feeling. When something's wrong or something- you get your family's blessing. Like whatever road you take, hopefully they're still with you.
> [Thomas, Individual Interview, 66]

Participants in this study may have experienced school-related difficulties as a result of having LD. Support from parents encouraged them to overcome obstacles to the daily challenges faced by students with academic and social/emotional difficulties. Martin said that his mother maintained the expectation that he would control his anger, and Earl, Ron, and Thomas discussed ways in which their parents would encourage, and sometimes force, them to attend school despite their own efforts to be truant.

> When I was little I always tried to fake sick so I could get out of school. Right now I can't fake sick anymore. They'll bring me to school and everything.
> [Thomas, Individual Interview, 214]

Sometimes helping students set and reach for their goals required parents to take disciplinary actions. Ron was the only student that gave any concrete examples of this. He said his mother coerced him into going to school on Saturdays in order to make up for classes he skipped. Had he not attended, he would be behind on his graduation plan.

> The school called my mom and told her, so she woke me up and said I had to go to Saturday school. And I go, 'For what?' 'You didn't tell me about your tardies.' 'Oh yeah.' So she made me go.
> [Ron, Individual Interview, 130]

> So [my mother] goes through her lunch break and she'll ask, 'Did he come to this class and did he come to that class?' and if [the attendance office personnel] say no, she'll come home and get mad. Then I just don't talk on the phone for the whole day.
> [Ron, Individual Interview, 162]

At other times, parents/guardians offered rewards to keep students moving toward their goals. Joe said his parents offer him monetary incentives for good grades, and Ricky said his dad said he would give him a car if he reaches the goal of high school graduation.

Participants also expected their parents/guardians to give advice from time to time. The extent to which students discussed this varied from group to group. While some European Americans and Latinos said they would ask their parents/guardians how to accomplish the goals they set for themselves, African American students were more likely to recall specific advice their parents gave them, and how they intended to use it.

DeShawn remembered a time when his father explained to him that unskilled labor jobs require workers to work long hours for little money and that jobs requiring additional schooling provide better opportunities for earning a living, the conversation continued to impact his thinking regarding transition planning.

> When I was small-I think I was 13-my dad asked me a question if I ever wanted to work at McDonald's all my life, working hard and making a small amount of money and working hard for it or make a whole lot of money and work less. When I'm at work that always comes to my mind, because I work hard and I make less money. So I'm thinking about that. I need to go to school because I can't do this.
> [DeShawn, Individual Interview, 164]

> I kind of bring [my basketball dreams] up and then my mom's like, 'Well, you know, remember, you have to graduate and get the books right.'
> [Thomas, Individual Interview, 98]

> She also told me like don't just depend on wrestling because, like I said, like football, I might end up getting hurt. Then I won't have anything to fall back on. So that's why she wants me to go to college.
> [Martin, Individual Interview, 93]

Additionally, students attributed their practical knowledge of daily living skills considered important during transition planning (e.g., money management) to their parents' instruction. Earl, Joe, Martin and DeShawn all mentioned their knowledge of money management, which they said they learned from their parents. DeShawn added that his dad did more complicated tasks, such as filing federal income taxes for him [Individual Interview, 200].

Occasionally, participants across groups also brought up the limitations in their discussions of transition planning with parents. Across groups, participants said that the topic of transition planning was not necessarily a commonplace topic of discussion at home. Earl and Ricky were representative of many participants as they fluctuated between saying they did and did not talk about their futures with their parents. DeShawn's perception was more decided.

> Well, [we don't talk about my career goals] that much. Not recently, probably when I was little I brought it up. That was a while back.
> [DeShawn, Focus Group, 52]

While European Americans introduced the idea of family tension, African American and Latino participants said that they and their parents sometimes had differing ideas about which goals were worthy of pursuit.

Two European Americans talked about family tension to the extent that silence sometimes prevailed in their households. Marshall was the only student who said he never discussed any of his future plans with his mother or father. He stated that he did not know what his mother expected of him in the future. Although he did not say so explicitly, he indicated that tension at home could have been an issue.

> I usually don't talk to [my mother]. I usually don't see her for half of the day because I'm always out riding my bike.
> [Marshall, Individual Interview, 132]

Trent also mentioned a tense relationship with his father, and although they had touched on the subject, never in much detail.

> My dad-me and my parents don't get along very well-never have, so I don't get to talk to them very much about it.
> [Trent, Individual Interview, 24]

Sometimes participants' expectations of themselves did not always match those of their parents, which resulted in differing ideas about the future. Uncertainty, rather than friction, commonly resulted from discrepant expectations. In other words, students said that they were unaware of their parents' expectations or the discussion between parent and child did not progress beyond the sharing of dissimilar future goals. For example, both Ron and Thomas said that they were reluctant to pursue military career options although their parents had been proponents of a postsecondary plan involving the armed services.

> She goes, 'You going to the Navy?' I was like, 'No.' 'Army?' and all this, and I said, 'No.' She said, 'What do you want to do?' I just kept saying, 'I don't know.'
> [Ron, Individual Interview, 23]

Thomas's father and uncle were both in the military and from time to time, they encouraged him to join. He was reluctant, however, and seemed unsure of their acceptance of him if he decided not to enlist.

> [My father] mostly says the same thing --- do what you want to do. So I'm fine with that. If I go, I go. They'll be happy for me. If I don't go, hopefully they'll still be happy for me.
> [Thomas, Individual Interview, 64]

When Jaime talked about his goal of becoming a professional soccer player, he worried that his father doubted him.

> [My father's reaction is] Like surprise, because I think my dad doesn't believe me about that-but my mom does. I usually talk to my mom instead of my dad. My mom pays more attention to us than my dad.
> [Jaime, Focus Group, 316]

Jaime was considering joining his father and brothers in the family roofing business, where he currently worked, but found the idea unappealing.

> I would like to go into his business, but it is too much work. We only get one break a week. We only get breaks on Sundays. By the weekend I am very tired.
> [Jaime, Individual Interview, 71]

Although Jesus said that he had his doubts about working with his dad on a full-time basis, he had not considered careers other than auto mechanic partly because he was concerned about his father's reaction.

> I don't know. Probably [my father would act] like maybe a little disappointed or something.
> [Jesus, Individual Interview, 21]

He felt ambiguous about the idea of going into business with his father, and stated that he knows the option was a secure one because his dad would "help him out" but that he was unsure about having to work with him every day.

When Tony talked about his mother and grandmother's reaction to his goal of being a teacher, their response was ambiguous, never revealing whether they think teaching was a good endeavor for Tony to follow.

> [My mother and grandmother] say that's a big dream to become a teacher; it's a big responsibility.
> [Tony, Individual Interview, 58]

Extended family members. Participants talked about the influences that their extended family members and siblings had on the goals they set and the plans they made. One difference between race/ethnic groups was apparent; while African Americans identified strongly with their parents and spoke about how important they were to the transition planning process, members of this group did not detail or emphasize the influence of extended family members. Both European American and Latino youth addressed the importance of aunts, uncles, and grandparents in the development of their goals and plans in some detail.

Only one African American participant mentioned involving extended family members in the transition planning process. One of Thomas's uncles had been in the

military and they had discussed whether he should consider joining. Thomas had been thinking about the option and his uncle was willing to give him advice on the matter.

> Yeah, that crossed my mind joining the military and everything. It's like a part of me says, 'Do you really want to join the military or are you just doing that because your uncle was in the military?' It's kind of like a tie at the moment, so I struck that out…During family get-togethers we talk about the military. He was young when he got into the military. He said it was rough, but he said follow your heart, wherever your heart wants to go.
> [Individual Interview, 52, 56]

European American students discussed the important role extended family members played in their futures planning, whether it be through encouragement and support, or through leading by example. Forest, repeatedly stated the positive effect of his grandmother, who was his legal guardian, on him as he met the challenges of high school. Earl was able to maintain employment through a connection with an uncle who hired him as a carpet layer and maintenance worker.

Both Earl and Trent were considering military careers and each had uncles and aunts in the military. Both young men mentioned discussing various options relative to military careers with their extended family members. While Trent's aunt was able to give him specific advice about a military career, the distance between the family members made it impossible for him to consult her help extensively.

> Well, I usually don't talk to my aunt and uncle because they're just so far away. I don't get much chance to. They live in [the North Eastern United States].
> [Trent, Individual Interview, 24]

Forest's uncle, on the other hand, lived relatively close to him. Forest described how he sought out the advice of his uncle, and why he found it most helpful.

> He asked me to write out a business plan and he was like, 'What kind of steps are you going to take to get to this and that and if that doesn't work, what's going to be your back-up?' Just stuff like that. And if he thinks something is not going to work he'll talk to me about it.
> [Forest, Individual Interview, 36]

Forest added that constructive criticism from his uncle was his motivation for initiating conversation on the topic.

> I want to see if [my grandmother and uncle] support my idea or not. But pretty much my grandma always does. But my uncle is always trying to look at it from every angle.
> [Forest, Individual Interview, 102]

Sometimes, participants discussed the convenience of having extended relatives to contact simply to find out more about a postsecondary option and demystify potential experiences. Earl was considering taking some courses at a local community college after he graduated. He said that his cousins, who were enrolled there already, have made him feel more comfortable about choosing this option.

> Well, my cousins are in it and they tell me that it is a good school. You could work out of your home, do your work at home and everything. And get a college degree.
> [Earl, Individual Interview, 112]

Participants' references to extended family members included knowing what those members expected of them in terms of their futures, or advice those members could gave them that might make them more successful. Joe said he discussed his career plans with his aunt and mother.

> My aunt. She says that I'll be a great doctor. And then my mom says I'll succeed in being a doctor.
> [Joe, Individual Interview, 22]

Michael had also talked to his grandfather about what he should do in the future.

> Once we use to go without, no electricity or water. And then I just go up to my grandpa and he used to tell me not to a fancy job or anything, just get a job so you can support your family.
> [Michael, Focus Group, 149]

Tony talked about the type of information about the local community college Tony had received from his aunt who went there.

> And plus, my aunt, she went to CCC. I thought that was good… [We talked about] What did you do there? Did they have stuff for my needs? Also how long I'll be there for my classes-like if I stay there long, like seven or six years-or I keep working hard and I just do four years.
> [Tony, Individual Interview, 7,9]

While Tony had a career goal to become a teacher, he said that he could talk to his uncle about getting a job at the same grocery where his uncle worked. He also said that he contacted his uncle about joining his band and pursuing his goal to become a musician.

Michael, who aspired to be a doctor, had an uncle who practiced medicine, but like Trent, their contacts were limited.

> I only talk to him every once in a while because barely see him (and that is all I am going to say). We talk about what he does and I'm curious. And, I ask him how he does, how he got there, and he tells me it was hard. He started his own business and all that.
> [Michael, Individual Interview, 46]

Nevertheless, he identified this uncle as someone he could go to for help with his career planning.

> I think it would be my uncle because he would help you with anything really. And he is a real good guy. He would teach me what not to do, if he made the mistakes so I could go through a straight path and get to where I need to go.
> [Michael, Individual Interview, 189]

For Latinos, interaction between the participants and extended family members seemed more for the purpose of counsel and decision-making. Both Tony's mother and grandmother set expectations for him and discussed what he needed to do to reach his goals. Jaime said that when he needed to decide where to live and what to do for the future he would ask many members of his family for advice.

> I will be asking him like, I will be asking my mom and my dad and my uncles. I will be thinking about it, whether I'm staying.
> [Jaime, Individual Interview, 88]

Siblings. Across groups, discussions of sibling interaction varied greatly, in part because of differences in the presence of siblings in the home, numbers of siblings, and birth order of participants. Generally, but not exclusively, participants said older siblings did help shape their goals and plans. For African Americans and Latinos, references to younger siblings involved providing extended help or care, influencing plans to leave or stay at home after graduation, or setting goals for financial gain. Martin and Thomas said they would like to help support other family members as needed. Jaime and Michael said they would do the same. Joe and Earl, European Americans and oldest children in their respective families, did not touch on this topic.

Support from older siblings mirrored the support parents/guardians offered participants during goal setting and planning. Whereas many of the parents had not been to college, siblings who had were in better position to offer advice or assistance. Also, in the case of Latino parents, some had not been through the U.S. school system as students, but participants' siblings had. Nevertheless, comments from all three groups suggested siblings' expertise, when sought and/or received by participants, was more relative to postsecondary education rather than high school education. In some cases this was also true for employment; brothers and sisters helped participants find jobs.

The college experiences of participants did vary by group. Three of the four African American participants (DeShawn, Ron, and Thomas) had older siblings who went to college, while only one European American participant (Sam) had a similar role model; other members of this group were the oldest children or the only children in their families. Two of the five Latino participants (Jaime and Michael) also had older siblings who attended college.

Thomas was the only participant who said he and his sister talked about future goals with specificity. He said that when he goes to his sister when he has concerns or questions about college.

> She supports me with [the goal of college]. Any time I have a question about college she'll talk to me about it. If I get nervous or something, like, 'Do I really want to go to college?' She'll talk me out of it. 'You can go to college. Anybody can go.'
> [Individual Interview, 106]

Not only did Thomas say that his sister was aware of his goals for the future, he knew what she wanted to do as well.

Contrastingly, DeShawn said that he did not talk about his plans for the future with his sister, who is ten years older than he. And although Sam said he could go to his sister for help regarding the selection of a culinary arts program, he had not yet done so. Marshall said that he did not talk to his sister much about these issues because she had dropped out of high school.

Latino participants also had older siblings who had attended CCC. Jaime said his sister had gone there and that he was planning to talk to her about application requirements and the admissions process itself. Michael said he would also talk to his older brother, who after attending the local community college, transferred to a large state university. Michael did not, however, specify what types of questions he would ask his brother.

Some participants looked to siblings for advice or help on other transitional issues. Ron did say that his sister has been instrumental in helping him find employment in the past, using her connections with friends to get him jobs. And although he said he and his sister do not talk about transition planning much, he tried to ascertain through conversations with her and his mother if he could handle college-level work. Both of the women responded that they thought he could handle it. Jaime, a senior, would defer to his brother and other family members when deciding whether to

continue living at home after graduation. Although he did not connect the two explicitly, Jaime said that he was considering a career in soccer or working in the family business, so perhaps the advice he wanted from his brother was also relevant to this decision.

> Yeah, I am going to be asking my other brother what does he think? Would he like me to stay or leave?
> [Jaime, Individual Interview, 86]

Teachers. Students from all three groups said that occasionally their teachers played important roles in their own transition planning process. Teachers helped them set goals and make attempts to reach those goals in much the same way that parents did. In fact, the most positive role participants identified for teachers was that of "caring friend," who would actively participate in students' transition planning process by noticing strengths, maintaining high expectations, and affirming students' efforts.

Encouragement came from teachers sharing their impressions of the students' strengths. Teachers noticed students' talents and supported extracurricular activities that kept students connected to the goals they wanted to pursue. DeShawn and Martin talked about these experiences in art classes and club when the teacher discussed their talents with them and others. Ron experienced this during class work.

> They're like, 'Did you take this class already?' and you say, 'No.' 'Well, you're a smart guy. You should take this class,' and all this. Like my third period teacher she tells me I'm good with kids and she wants me to help the slower kids in life skills. They never put me in the class though.
> [Ron, Individual Interview, 276]

Few students in the European American group reported being inspired or encouraged to pursue specific long-range goals by teachers. Earl and Forest were exceptions. One of Earl's teachers in middle school sparked not only his creativity, but also his self-confidence, and made a lasting impression.

> Well, I was in my class and I got some free time and she had some Legos and stuff. You know Legos? You build stuff? [My teacher] said, 'Wow, you are great with your hands and everything, at building stuff.'
> [Earl, Individual Interview, 56, 70]

Forest's teacher connected his aptitude and his career dreams, making learning relevant.

> [My teacher] says it would be a good idea to just learn really complicated math anyways. He says I'm probably going to need it for designing the skate parks. But he was like if that doesn't work, if you get a degree in Calculus you can pretty much get any job you want.
> [Forest, Individual Interview, 22]

Teachers further supported students by "pushing" them and making their expectations known to the students. This type of support came in the form of telling the student to study harder, to prepare for college, to "try your hardest," and to "stick to" high goals. When asked if students knew what expectations their teachers had of them Thomas, Martin, Forest replied in a similar fashion; teachers made generalized statements of expectations regarding postsecondary education and/or broad references to current performance in school.

Some students, in particular European Americans, reported that their teachers' expectations of them were oriented to the present rather than the future. To "finish school" was a common teacher expectation noted by these students. Students also mentioned more immediate goals, such as "to do your work" or to complete a specific assignment correctly. Additional support came in the form of providing help to students who were floundering academically. Trent said that his coach was able to tutor him in difficult subjects.

> My folder teacher, she tells me every time when I have some work to do. She just helps me. 'You need to do this work,' and I'm like, 'Oh, okay. Well, I guess I'll do it. Thanks for telling me now I am going to pass.' but that was like 9th grade, so now I don't need her help anymore, I always pass. I'm a better student.
> [Joe, Focus Group, 276]

> When I am failing or something like that. That's about the only time. A lot of my teachers I don't talk to them unless I'm going to fail in their class and that's when they'll tell me what I need to do.
> [Sam, Focus Group, 261]

Martin had had a similar experience.

> He's always pushing me to, if I start like dropping, if my grades start dropping in his class, he will like tell me to come to his class at the school and do some extra work…. They say, 'I expect you to do better on this. You done good last week and you can do better.'
> [Martin, Individual Interview, 85, 99]

Some of the support identified by these students was emotional support that included the teachers' demonstration of "caring" for the students. Jaime and Ricky said that they have had teachers with whom they were close, and conversed about their futures. Sometimes students referred to these teachers as friends or compared them to

their parents. Many people they identified as being most helpful were not their classroom teachers, but rather teachers and coaches they knew outside of the classroom.

> Yeah, they know because they like me. Most all of them like me. They ask me about my future and all that stuff. My teachers know that. They know me. They just know. Especially my friends … Right now, I think my coach-and Ms. R [will help me the most]. [She's not my folder teacher] she's just a friend.
> [Jaime, Focus Group, 90, Individual Interview, 19, 20]

> [My teacher] was a good lady. We talked about everything, our future, everybody in the class's future. Yeah, I talked to her but she retired…
> [Ricky, Individual Interview, 63]

> Only one teacher knows about [my plan to be a doctor] and she just tells me, she calls me pushing me to do the work so I can go on with my plan.
> [Michael, Individual Interview, 175]

> Because teachers are my best friends and they've been there for me and I've been there for them every day in class, raise my hand, answer questions for people who don't answer questions. I'm not a teacher's pet or nothing. I'm just a student…[The teachers] basically tell me the same thing like my parents [to motivate me to reach my goals].
> [Tony, Focus Group, 78, 82]

For the European American students, discussing future plans with teachers was not commonplace. Forest was the exception. Whether or not students had conversations about their long-range plans seemed to be contingent upon the closeness of their relationship. Nevertheless, students gave few examples that detailed their teachers' long-range expectations of them.

> Different teachers-like some teachers like to talk. There's two teachers that I talk to. They'll tell me like the expectations, sometimes not even schoolwise but other things.
> [Sam, Focus Group, 265]

> Yeah, [I talk about future plans with] my math teacher. I've known him for three years. He's a pretty good friend of mine.
> [Forest, Focus Group, 56]

Other than Forest, no European American students said that they had been encouraged to attend college after high school.

Thomas was the only African American to identify an example of teachers in the role of supporters.

> They tell me, 'Thomas, that's a high goal. I hope you stick with that.' My teachers are happy for my goals and everything. I know like when I make it, they'll see me on the TV screen and say, 'You know, I had that student.'
> [Thomas, Individual Interview, 100]

Students could identify teachers who provided specific transition-related skill practice more readily than those who provided general information. In fact, no European American students identified situations in which their teachers provided general information on transitioning to adulthood; however, they did recall instances in which specific skills, including writing resumes and completing employment applications, were taught. Although Marshall and Earl took vocational education classes at different campuses, their experiences seemed similar.

> Well, the class is basically about applications and how to get a job.
> [Marshall, Individual Interview, 168]

> Teaching you how to write your own résumé and everything and apply for jobs, how to dress for jobs and everything. That's pretty much it. Just everything about jobs in that class.
> [Earl, Individual Interview 351]

DeShawn was the only African American to identify a specific transition related skill, applying for college exams and admissions, that teachers were currently helping him complete.

> Like right now I'm still talking to [my teachers] now. I'm graduating in May and right now I'm already taking my SATs and stuff. I'm going to start taking those. And right now they're trying to help me get into CCC. I'm talking about it right now. Kind of, the wheels are already going.
> [DeShawn, Focus Group, 56]

But participants across groups also reported that they did not discuss transition planning with teachers at all. Students said that teachers were generally unaware of the paths the students themselves had selected to pursue. Joe, who aspired to be a doctor, said he hadn't discussed future plans with his teachers.

> No. I haven't been with any teachers to talk about doctor stuff.
> [Joe, Individual Interview, 34]

Similarly, Marshall, Trent, and Earl all reported that they did not talk to any of their teachers about future dreams. Sam, who wanted to be a chef, said his teachers probably did not know that about him.

> Yeah, because I don't really talk about that much … Most of the teachers who care would go, 'Oh, he's probably going to do something good,' but nothing really set in mind or anything.
> [Sam, Individual Interview, 266, 270]

Marshall, who was enrolled in a vocational education class, said he could not remember any teacher asking him what he planned on doing after high school. Nevertheless, he had identified a goal for himself; he wanted to work in construction.

He said he was interested in trying an apprenticeship, but that he had not spoken to anyone at school about that possibility.

Sometimes Latino students reported that teachers did not connect with them to provide any real guidance in transition planning.

> Actually, I don't think they had a chance to be able to ask me. Usually, I'm the kind of person, I will sit in the back, I'll have my jacket on, my CD player, listening to it and trying to do my work. I'm not disturbing nobody, so I don't think they do know [my plans for the future]. But if they do come over with something like that, I'll do it. I'll tell them what I want to be.
> [Ricky, Focus Group, 84]

Jesus said his teachers did not know of his desire to be an auto mechanic, nor had they spoken about available programs at the local community college, where Jesus was interested in going to school. When he wanted to take part in the OJT program, he had a tough time connecting with his folder teacher, who would have been in charge of making those arrangements.

> Well, I always was going to my folder teacher and telling her. She's always busy doing her own thing, so I just stopped telling her.
> [Jesus, Focus Group, 159]

Even for Tony, whose relationship with his math teacher inspired him to think about becoming a teacher himself, a more detailed discussion of following through with plans toward future goals did not occur.

> No [we didn't talk about how to become a teacher], [my math teacher] just said 'you need to become a teacher.'
> [Tony, Individual Interview, 44]

At times, students were unable to articulate teachers' expectations of them and indicated that their teachers "didn't care" about the goals they had identified.

> Well, they ask me what I'm going to do after school and I always tell them I don't know yet. That's all they say...skip to the next page.
> [Martin, Focus Group, 206]

> My second period teacher knows I want to play basketball a lot. He just tells me to do it, don't listen to nobody else and try your hardest. My first period teacher, she don't care.
> [Ron, Focus Group, 377]

> They just don't want to think about the future yet, they want to just think about what is going to happen now.
> [Martin, Individual Interview, 143]

Mentors. Very rarely, participants mentioned getting information and advice from adults who were fulfilling the role of mentor, either formally or informally. African Americans did not mention any relationships characteristic of mentoring, and only one European American, Forest, and one Latino, Ricky, brought up the subject. Forest had a court-appointed mentor after he had been adjudicated on drug-related charges. He did not mention any interaction with this person; however, he did mention an informal mentoring relationship he had with a motivational speaker in juvenile detention. Although this relationship was short, it had a lasting impression on him. For Forest, this meeting was important because the visitor had been a professional skateboarder and he also had experience with substance abuse.

> Since I was like in the 7th grade I've always wanted to have a skate shop. Even the people that don't own the companies, like for skateboarding, they make like 20 million dollars a year. So I was like, 'That sounds pretty good.' And plus, skateboarders always need a new skateboard deck, and those are the most expensive things

> because they break about every month. So it's insured business. The skate park-I don't know-I just always wanted to have a park that people could enjoy. Like the idea that I have is so you could like move it around and change it. I just thought that would be cool. Like I talked to this one dude that owns a skateboarding company, and he says he knows some people that would probably give me a whole bunch of money to start my idea. That was pretty cool. That happened to me when I was [at the alternative campus]. He said he used to be a skater and a pothead and stuff and one day he like got in with this company and ended up selling his half of the company for like 450 million dollars.
> [Forest, Individual Interview, 4]

Forest mentioned later in the interview that if this acquaintance were willing to help him, he would put off his plans to attend college to start this business. He felt as though he had established a business contact.

> Yeah, he was like, 'Stuff can change.' He was like, 'I used to be a skater and a pothead.' He was like, 'Now I open up free skate parks and help people out.' I told him what I did and he was like, 'I know some people that would pay you a whole bunch of money to do that.' He gave me his name and his email address and everything.
> [Forest, Individual Interview, 12]

Aside from Forest's court appointed mentor, Ricky is the only participant who identified a mentor relationship that he cultivated on his own. This relationship was important because it helped shape Ricky's desire to become a police officer. He described Officer B and their mentoring friendship.

> And he is a pretty cool guy. I like him a lot. Really cool guy, you know? He always tells me that I should become a cop because it is a really good job and stuff. And I agree with him because I would like to do that. It would be a pretty good job for me.
> [Ricky, Individual Interview, 23]

The two have discussed specific ways in which Ricky can attain this career goal.

> He said to go to college after high school and stuff. And go to CCC or something. Then study criminal justice and go apply at the police station or something like that.
> [Ricky, Individual Interview, 32]

Peers. Conversations between participants and their peers about life after high school were reportedly rare for all participants. Furthermore, they ranged in scope and impact, across all three groups. Some participants did not discuss transition with friends, others found that peers poked holes in their plans; still others talked to their peers to pool resources of information or get advice.

In the focus group discussion, Tony initiated the topic of peers. He said that he discussed life after high school with his friends and that they share the same values in regard to finding employment.

> Most of my friends. They're like, 'I'm not going to live this lifestyle; don't want to go down like that.' I want to live my life to the fullest. Not just have fun in life-have some fun in life but still get the job done.
> [Tony, Focus Group, 100]

Whether peers helped students develop plans for attaining goals remained ambiguous. According to Ron, conversations about the future might get started, but no lengthy or fruitful discussion ensued.

> It's just like, 'Graduation is coming soon. What are we going to do?' And nobody says nothing so it just drops.
> [Individual Interview, 268]

Ricky was skeptical about whether his friends would engage in this type of discussion with him.

> Well, I think to someone that young, it would be kind of boring, because they are all young. What am I going to tell them? 'Oh, I am going to do...' And [my friend] is going say, 'Okay, I don't want to hear it.'
> [Ricky, Individual Interview, 343]

Joe and Marshall agreed that they did not talk about transitioning with their friends.

> [My friends and I] usually talk about weird stuff.
> [Marshall, Individual Interview, 142]

Although Sam said he doubted that teenagers talked about the topic much, he remembered that some of his friends did discuss their plans with him.

> My friends, they are talking to me about [life after high school]. It's two of them. They're already talking about earning money for it. They've already got some of the things that they need for whenever they move out, because they're moving out their senior year-at the end of the school year. Like in the summer they're going to be moving. So they already have some things set. They already have jobs ready. They've already earned a couple of bucks. One of them even does a little side job and earns a little bit more money. They're just like talking about what they'll be doing.
> [Sam, Individual Interview, 282]

Thomas reported that conversations with his friends have actually increased his self-doubt.

> I really can't talk to my friends about [the future]. They're like, 'No, you ain't gonna make it.' I really don't like listening to them… They're kidding around most of the time, but sometimes as a human being you just start to think, 'Well, maybe I can't go to college.' But you know, if you really want to go, you know you can do it.

DeShawn had a very different experience with one of his friends from work. DeShawn asked this friend for information regarding the local community college

because the friend was currently enrolled there. His friend eventually took him for a campus visit and to meet with one of the counselors.

> ...One of my co-workers at work, he's like one of the crew workers. He goes to CCC. Every once in a while I'll talk to him about it.
> [Focus Group, 102]

Michael also thought of his friends as resources for information. He said that some of his friends are planning to go to CCC and that they do discuss how to apply and what the experience will have to offer.

DeShawn also identified support from his girlfriend and her family when he moved from his parents' home to a place of his own.

> [My girlfriend] helped me out a little bit. And her mom helped a little bit. Like when I was looking for a job and I didn't have any money, they lent me some money. If I needed somewhere to sleep and stuff, they definitely helped me out on that part until I got on my feet.
> [DeShawn, Individual Interview, 36]

Both Forest and Trent sought the opinions of their friends regarding the plans they developed for postsecondary goals. Forest spoke with his best friend who he said had similar goals, yet he said he thought he was the only one of his group of peers actually working on a plan.

> Friends. I'm seeing if they would want to help me. I don't think I can do it just on my own.
> [Forest, Focus Group, 64]

Trent spoke to an older friend who had already joined the military and could offer a voice of experience.

> I've talked to my friend. He's in the Air Force. He's just got out of basic training. Just graduated. I talk to him about it.
> [Trent, Focus Group, 65]

Experience Provided Direction

Students' dreams for the future germinated from many sources. In addition to encouragement and resources from parents, other family members, teachers, and peers, relevant life experiences provided impetus for future goals. Some of these experiences came from school and work settings and gave students the opportunity to identify activities they found pleasurable and activities where they demonstrated skill or aptitude. Some of the experiences actually provided negative examples to the students, illustrating those activities they did not like and/or they did not do well. Other experiences were neither good nor bad; rather, they provided fodder for students to consider when thinking about their goals for the future.

Employment. Work experiences, which included summer employment, part-time or full-time employment, or employment in the family business, provided participants with information on which to base future employment goals. For European American participants, however, these experiences were fewer in number. Rates of employment and participation in OJT programs did differ among the groups. African Americans and Latinos were both employed and enrolled in vocational programs/courses in greater numbers. Table 4.1 shows the rate of enrollment in the OJT program and the rate of part-time employment during the school year.

Table 4.1

Employment Experiences of Participants

Participant Group	% Enrolled in OJT	% Part-time Employees
African American	50%	50%
European American	17%	17%
Latino	80%	60%

Often jobs the students currently held generated experiences that informed students' transition planning efforts. Most of the jobs students held could be categorized as entry-level positions that were compensated by minimum wage earnings and no benefits offerings. Examples of jobs included bussing dishes, bagging groceries, and laying carpet. DeShawn considered the labor-intensive work he was doing and wanted a career that would more rewarding, financially and intellectually. Ron had mixed feelings about his job:

> Yeah, [I like my job] but sometimes I don't. Sometimes I feel like it's just a living. Because there's a lot of people coming in kind of rude because the line's long, and when I check it takes forever because the computer is slow. And I'm like, 'Hello, how are you doing tonight?' They're like, 'Whatever, hurry up.'
> [Ron, Individual Interview, 62]

DeShawn's early experiences working with his father at an auto repair shop convinced him his career path should be different.

> [Being a mechanic] is fun to do, but that's not something I would like to do on a daily basis. Do you know what I'm saying? … I don't like being on the ground. I don't like to get dirty.
> [Individual Interview, 134, 136]

European American participants were employed and participated in OJT at lower rates when compared to African American and Latino participants. Only one, Earl, maintained steady employment throughout the school year. As a result, these students had fewer work experiences on which to base future career ideas. They generally did not mention any connection between jobs they had already held, and jobs they wanted to pursue in the future. Earl, who was released after only three periods of instruction each day so that he could go to work, did not mention how, if at all, his current maintenance job influenced his future career goals.

Although three of the five Latinos were employed at the time of the interviews, they generally did not discuss their work experiences in relation to their future goals in any detail. Jaime was considering joining his father and brothers in the family roofing business, where he currently worked, but the idea was unappealing to him.

> I would like to go into his business, but it is too much work. We only get one break a week. We only get breaks on Sundays. By the weekend I am very tired.
> [Jaime, Individual Interview, 71]

Clubs, extracurricular activities, and sports. Sometimes experiences that informed students' ideas about the future came from experiences they had while participating in extracurricular activities such as clubs and special events. Thomas and Martin both participated in school and community athletic teams and made connections with coaches and adult athletes. Martin had the opportunity to work out with members of the Dallas Cowboys football team at a local college gym, which was quite a

memorable and motivating experience for him. Some of the team members gave him advice about the future.

> Like, never give up. Don't think like... think like, 'You're the best of the best.' That is why people will pick you. Don't screw up.
> [Martin, Individual Interview, 49]

> Sometimes when Hoop it Up comes around, I'm jumping into that. That's like getting practice on the court. I have a basketball goal at home and I'm practicing then. So I'm practicing like three or four hours a day…Playing street ball with older guys and everything. When you're young, like my age, 16 and everything, if you score on an older guy you feel proud. You're like, 'If I can do that, imagine what else I can do.' So you just keep doing it over and over and you get happier and happier. 'I can do this! I can do this!'
> [Thomas, Individual Interview 30, 86]

Both DeShawn and Martin were in the art club at CHS, although they were members during different years and did not know each other in this context.

> Yeah. My art teacher, we went to an art contest that was in [Gulf City]… I got second place in that. She's been helping me ever since I went there. I talk to her a lot…
> [DeShawn, Focus Group, 64]

> [My art teacher] has talked to me about art and design, because like in eighth grade, I won a competition. That's how I went to [Metro City and Northwestville] and I won my trophy that sits over there at the bottom.
> [Martin, Individual Interview, 69]

Extracurricular activities that included informal play or organized playtime in school were influential to several European American students, too. Both Earl and Marshall, who sought careers in building planning and construction, mentioned being motivated by the toy, Legos. Earl first saw Legos in a classroom and then at home. Marshall encountered Legos at home as well.

> Well, I was in my class and I got some free time and [the teacher] had some Legos and stuff. You know Legos? You build stuff? … When [my parents] bring [transition planning] up, well the first time they brought it up, it was when they got me some Christmas presents and they let me have them early, like last year. And they, well not last year, but in middle school, they bought me some Legos, a box of Legos, and they let me open it a day early. And I built stuff for them. Built a lot of things.
> [Earl, Individual Interview, 56, 84]

> What got me interested in that? I don't know. When I was like five maybe, those Legos? I just started building stuff without even looking at the instructions. It just popped in my head. I started building them and I have been doing that ever since.
> [Marshall, Individual Interview, 25]

Church. DeShawn was the only student across groups who specifically mention experience gained in the context of his church community. In addition to drawing a master plan for the new church building, DeShawn sold drawings to community members.

> …like at church, school. Anything that people wanted, I would draw it. Like right now I have a teacher, I'm drawing something for him and he's going to pay me for it.
> [DeShawn, Focus Group, 70]

Postsecondary Educational Exploration. Campus visits, college interest nights, and meetings with recruiters all made impressions on these young men and their decisions to pursue college educations.

> When I was in the 10th grade [college recruiters] came to our school. He showed us people that went to his school and where they're at now. And then [the recruiter from the Art Institute] was like, 'You don't have to work so hard. You can stay on campus. You get paid to go there, too.' That's what I like, too. I get paid to do what I like to do. And then he said you can stay as long as you want. It's not no time limit to it.
> [DeShawn, Individual Interview 158]

> Well, I have this little packet of stuff that some of the schools have been sending me. Yeah, some of them sound like, they might send you stickers, sweaters, booklets, and videotapes about their schools.
> [Martin, Individual Interview, 18, 22]

Thomas said that when he was a freshman and his sister was a senior, they went to College Night at SHS. They filled out information cards to receive applications and catalogues from several colleges and universities.

> It was like College Night. I walked around with [my sister]. She visited most of the other colleges. They had people that came here supporting the college and everything. I walked around with her and they were asking me, 'Why don't you sign up for college?' I'm like, 'Well, I'm a freshman; I'm a freshman in high school. Can I sign up?' So they gave me the forms to fill out and everything. She helped me fill some of them out. She was like, 'Well, you know, Thomas, you're doing a good move right now. You're learning early to go to college.'
> [Individual Interview, 106]

Participants Identified Requisite Attitudes and Supports

Participants were more likely to talk about broad work habits and personal characteristics when identifying specific areas they needed to develop to realize their dreams for the future. Across groups their responses lacked specificity when they talked about what they needed to do to reach their future goals. If the ultimate goal was college, for example, they said they needed to be hard working rather than discussing some of the more concrete requisites such as taking college preparatory courses in high school. Perseverance, maturity, and initiative were the most frequently mentioned requisite attitudes or characteristics.

African American responses stood out from the other two groups in that the participants returned to their earlier discussion of emotional support from their parents. Ron, DeShawn, and Thomas all said that they needed the support of their parents. While they did not define this support in detail, they said they needed their parents to "just be there" for them and encourage them.

> When you have your family's support, friends, family, and even your neighbor's support, you know you can do it.
> [Thomas, Individual Interview, 118]

At the same time, however, all four young men said that they knew they had to do for themselves because their parents may not always be available for them. Perhaps DeShawn, now living on his own, had already experienced this.

> Because in school you pretty much, your parents pretty much got everything for you. You know what I'm saying? When you get older and you're by yourself, it's your responsibility now. So you've got to take care of your responsibility and you've got to do it fast. You can't just let it go. You have to get on it.
> [DeShawn, Focus Group, 225]

> Your parents are not always going to be there for you…You can't let somebody else do it for you. You won't get nowhere in life.
> [Martin, Focus Group, 229, 336]

Skills, such as study skills, or test-taking skills were not mentioned by any of the participants as requisite skills they needed to attain their goals. Material needs, primarily money to fund college expenses was mention by at least one member in each group, but it was not discussed in any detail.

Students Participated in the Special Education Process

As students discussed their dreams and hopes for the future, and their plans to reach them, they traversed roads paved with both informal and formal supports and obstacles. Transition to adulthood, barring death, will happen to all young people. For students in special education, however, transition planning and processes must follow aforementioned guidelines. For the most part, participants in this study spoke about these prescribed mechanisms guiding transition planning only when prompted with specific questions. Their characterization of transition planning during formal special education meetings (called either Individual Education Plan meetings (IEP) or Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) meetings) follows.

Across groups, students articulated very similar sentiments about their attendance at ARDs, their interpretation of the purposes for the meetings, and the resulting decisions and/or plans relative to postsecondary transition. Participants were neither decidedly negative nor overly positive about these experiences. Rather, they indicated that their involvement in the process ranged from passive to self-determining, but always fell on such a scale whose increments were determined by the adults in their lives.

ARD Attendance

Participants in this study had varied experiences in ARD meetings, as well as different levels of understanding about the special education process. During the

interview process, “ARD” and “IEP” needed to be defined or clarified for students. Although the subject of special education paperwork was discussed, components other than the ITP were neither named nor discussed in detail. Students’ comments revealed that they were unfamiliar with the proceedings of these meetings, and if they did attend, they did not remember many details from the meeting or the resulting documents.

> Yeah, or you're not sure if they're talking about you or not… They don't really show me the paperwork most of the time; they just show my mom… I understand what I sign. If you have to sign something it's pretty important, I think. Like if they need a signature then you should read over it at least twice.
> [Sam Individual Interview, 202, 204, 208]

Forest was unsure of the type of services he was receiving, although he familiar with the terminology, referring to himself as, “I'm like, I guess, a 504.”

Joe was the most confused by the term ARD and IEP. At one point he asked if the focus group interview was an ARD. As the other students talked about their experiences, however, he began to contribute his thoughts on the ARD process. This was a pattern common across groups during the discussion of ARD participation; students who originally stated they were unaware of ARD meetings later recalled attending them.

Some students reported that they regularly attended their annual ARD meetings, while others reported that they only remembered attending one or two. More than a few students reported that they either did not have ARDs, or they were not sure if they had. Michael and Trent were both newly admitted to special education, and therefore only

had one ARD each, which they both attended. Interestingly, Trent said that to his recollection most of his teachers did not attend the meeting. Joe and Earl had been in special education since before high school, however, neither could remember attending such a meeting. Earl later clarified that his meetings were conducted over the telephone with his parents or attended solely by him and his folder teacher.

DeShawn said that he had been in special education since fourth grade, but that until recently, he assumed he had been exited. Seeking help with scheduling is what led him to realize his continued placement in special education. In the following account, he explains how he met his special education case manager, or "folder teacher," his junior year.

> Half the time I didn't even know about it…I know in elementary I was, up until my fourth grade year, and after that-yeah, in my fourth grade year I went to ARD and that was my last one. They put me in all regular classes after that. So after that I was being in all regular classes. I had a couple of honor classes, all the rest of them was regular. And I never had any special ed classes. So I really didn't know…until my eleventh grade year, that's when I found out. Because I went to fill out my Choice Sheet of what I wanted this year and that's when [the principal] told me. She was like, because like, I hadn't figured mine out and I was like, 'Who can I go to to help me fill this out and what classes did I need?' Because my counselor, she was out for like the rest of that semester. She had to go to the hospital. And like, I didn't know who else to go to…the principal…told me to go to my folder teacher and I didn't know who… [she] was and they had switched my folder teachers. So I never knew who my first one was, and then they switched me to Ms. Z…So when I went to her she was telling me about all of that. I was like, 'I didn't even know.' She was asking me all this stuff and I was clueless. I didn't know nothing about it. She was like, 'Have you been to these [ARDs]?' I was like, 'No.' She said, 'Do you know who your folder teacher was?' And I was like, 'No.' She said, 'Did you know that you were a special ed student?' and I was like 'No.'

[DeShawn, Individual Interview, 74, 76]

Across groups, students said that they attended ARDs because their parents and/or teachers "made" them. Ron and Martin said that school personnel, their teacher and assistant principal respectively, required them to attend ARDs. Thomas said his parents made him go, which he had mixed feelings about.

> I really don't want to go to those, but my parents make me. They'll pull me out of class. I want to stay in class then. But they're also fun to go to… You're out of class. You're sitting down. You don't have the teacher talking to you…
> [Thomas, Individual Interview, 166,168]

Somewhat antithetical to the experiences of teachers who sought out students for ARD participation, were the perceptions of some students that teachers did not "care" whether they came to a meeting. According to these participants, the majority of whom were European American, teachers other than their special education case managers, whose responsibility it was to lead the meeting and complete paperwork, only occasionally attended these meetings.

> [The caring teachers] expect you to be involved with it; if you don't like something speak up, because they just think you should be in where you need to be in. They expect you to be the same-respectful. I don't know.
> [Sam, Individual Interview, 262]

Trent, who had been identified as a special education student for only one year, had only met his special education case manager once at that initial ARD. Earl said he "really didn't know" his folder teacher. Forest said that he only talked to his special education case manager when school was not going well.

> Oh yeah, [my folder teacher]. I don't see her too much. She really doesn't talk to me. Most of the time I'm taking care of my stuff.
> [Forest, Individual Interview, 70]

Purpose of ARD Meetings

Students submitted several purposes of ARD meetings, but out of all the responses, transition planning was only mentioned once, when Jaime said that the teachers wanted know "if I'm going to college," and other postsecondary planning issues. The most common perception, held by students from all three groups, was that the primary purpose of ARD meetings was to determine students' schedules for the following school year and/or credits toward students' courses of study.

> [The teachers] were just talking about like what classes to put me in for next year. To see if I wanted to do OJT...they just asked me like what classes I wanted to take and then they would just write it down.
> [Jesus, Individual Interview, 37, 39]

> Why do I go? To see for like next year what classes I might be getting. If I don't like a class I can change it. That's about it.
> [Marshall, Individual Interview, 179]

> I guess just to know what classes you're getting, so you can say, 'I don't want that,' or 'I want this class instead of that' or 'I took this and y'all are trying to give it to me again,' because that happened a couple of times. They put me in English III and I already had it.
> [Ron, Individual interview, 102]

Sam brought up the idea that in addition to scheduling, the purpose of the ARD was to address any problem areas. Earl agreed and said teachers reported his behavior to his parents. Jaime and Tony said that the progress report was academic in nature. In general, students said that this type of discussion was for the purpose of informing parents or helping students improve their performance.

> [The teachers] normally talk about my classes, like what's going on, why am I never there, stuff like that.
> [Sam, Focus Group, 103]

> I know the meeting is for me, but just to try to make me do better. I guess sometimes [my academic performance] is good, but sometimes it isn't. Probably to help me. I don't know-I guess if I'm having any home problems, too, they try to talk to me about that too. They kind of get on me about that.
> [Forest, Individual Interview, 106, 112]

Rather than identifying ARD discussions that included progress reports to parents as helpful, Joe thought that teachers used this opportunity to get students in trouble.

> Well, my teacher says she's going to a meeting and then they want to talk to my parents. I just want to be there and see if they're going to tell the truth. Sometimes they are like, yeah, Joe does this or Joe does that... Like I had one teacher and she kept on telling me that I didn't bring my pencil. I had a pencil and she said that I borrowed that pencil. And I was like, 'No I didn't.'
> [Joe, Focus Group, 99]

Ron was the only African American participant to identify the purpose of the ARD as a forum for teachers to discuss the wrong doings of students. He felt adamantly about this and suggested that teachers "tried" to get students in trouble.

> Teachers tell too much info…Half of the time. And the worst is just because they want you in this class and the teacher starts telling all the bad things you did, like a long time ago you fell asleep in her class and you come late all the time. Stuff like that…Then I look at my mom and say, 'I be tired sometimes.'
> [Ron, Focus Group and Individual Interview, 118, 120]

But Forest said that having the teachers report to parents/guardians is not such a bad idea because the teachers could help him correct problems that come up. Michael

agreed and said that another purpose of his ARD was to provide help and improve his situation in school.

> They were asking me how I was doing and all that. And then they asked me which way will be best for me to learn. If I liked to do like the [state exit tests] on the computer and all that … I am going to get the classes that are needed to graduate with my recommended credits. To get that done and try to get something to help me pass all my classes.
> [Individual Interview, 81, 193]

Ricky and Tony also thought that one purpose of the ARD was to provide help to the student.

> The first time I was planning where they were going to put me because the classes I was having were very complicated. So they had an ARD so they could put me down in lower classes so I wouldn't struggle and fail. So ARDs, I think they are pretty good.
> [Ricky, Focus Group, 109]

> Same thing-checking out what class I'm going to be in and what I need to be in, make sure I'm not suffering or getting nervous, something I can handle at my own speed.
> [Tony, Focus Group, 113]

While discussing the purposes of ARDs, participants across groups said that attending the meetings gave them some idea of what decisions would be made about them, or on their behalves, and defined their own role as a passive one, or one in which they participated only when asked for input. Finding out decisions that were made about scheduling was important to the students. In fact, their comments reflected that finding out what courses they would be placed in was the greatest benefit to attending ARDs themselves, because they were able to express their opinions and concerns on this matter.

> Finding out what they're going to do to me. What they're going to try to do to me.
> [Earl, Individual Interview, 381]

> Just when they were kind of like, 'Oh, what classes would you want to go to?' Different things like that. Because I am in self-contained and so they were like, 'We think you should stay in here for so long.' And I was just like, 'I don't really care.' It is just another class.
> [Sam, Individual Interview, 46]

> The best thing would probably be knowing that I can plan ahead. After I go to the meeting I can plan ahead for like next year and get ready for all my classes and stuff. That's probably about it.
> [Marshall, Individual Interview, 215]

Scheduling changes, however, did not always bring about the desired outcome and did not always satisfy the student's needs or desires.

> Sometimes it always doesn't work out. Like a lot of times when they change your schedule around sometimes you get the worst teacher you can get.
> [Forest, Focus Group, 135]

Martin attended an ARD and when his long-range plan of study came up, he noticed some changes had been made.

> They once talked about me taking a second language, but then they said I don't. Like for graduation for her, my little sister, she has to take a second language…They said they were changing it but they didn't tell me why.
> [Individual Interview, 115, 120]

Martin said he had mixed emotions about the switch:

> Both. Wondered why and I did want to learn Spanish, but from what they tell me, it is hard. But that wouldn't stop me. I'll just try to take it next year...I tried to sign up for it, but they didn't give it to me.
> [Individual Interview, 122, 124]

Thomas also expressed concerns about the scheduling issues he encountered in an ARD. In order to fulfill Thomas's IEP stipulations that he attend inclusion classes, he had to have a change of schedule.

> Then they change your whole schedule around and so you've got to go to new classes and meet new people. That's kind of hard.
> [Thomas, Individual Interview, 150]

ARD Participation

Students used a variety of participation skills once they were in ARD meetings. From nonparticipation and passivity to self-advocacy and self-determination, students' perceptions about their own participation came out during the interview process. The roles participants in this study were willing to take on did not vary by participants' race/ethnic group. Participants often referenced their parents'/guardians' expectations of their behavior during ARD meetings, and said that their participation coincided with what they perceived were the expectations their parents had of them. At other times, students' participation was governed by their own perceptions and feelings regarding the process itself. For example, Marshall said that he was shy and naturally felt nervous at ARD meetings. He said this contributed to his willingness to play an active role in the discussions that took place during the meetings.

> I would tell them that I didn't like it, I cannot do computers, and I don't want to get that class…Maybe [I'd tell the ARD committee]…I don't know. Probably my shyness [would hold me back].
> [Marshall, Individual Interview, 191, 195]

Yet, Marshall's participation style seemed similar to his description of his mother's participation in the meeting.

> [My mother] just sits there and listens. She'll listen and she'll start talking and I think she'll be calm.
> [Marshall, Individual Interview, 203]

Members of each group described three broad categorizations of their own behavior: listening, agreeing with the committee, or stating own ideas and opinions.

Listening. Students described two types of listening: either passive listening, where participants were physically present but too bored, intimidated, or otherwise disengaged to really consider what the adults were saying; or, active listening, where participants were paying attention to the discussion. For example, they said would listen rather than talk because that is what their parents wanted them to do. Trent said that his parents expected him agree with them.

> I just sit there and listen. They're like, 'Is this okay with you?' 'Okay.'… It really doesn't matter because it's like nothing really big. I mean they ask questions like do you want to have two extra days on homework and stuff. 'Yeah.' That's basically all they asked me.
> [Trent, Focus Group, 110, 112]

During the focus group interview with European Americans, the following exchange took place between Sam and Forest, agreeing that the best way to participate was to remain passive.

> I don't really talk. I just let them go on and talk to my mom. They look at me every once in a while and I'll just be like, 'Sure.' [Sam, 119]
>
> Just smile and nod. [Forest, 120]

> I smile and nod and everything will be all right. [Sam, 121]

Jaime, who attended ARDs with his mother, said that she expected him to behave and not participate too much. Jaime said it was easier just to listen.

> And they talk to her too. No one really talks to me too. And they ask me what I want to take next year or after my school year is over. [Individual Interview, 9]

Martin agreed that the teachers primarily addressed his mother, resulting in his nonparticipation.

> I just sit there and look around while everybody talks. [Individual Interview, 155].

Sometimes Ricky also felt as though teachers were more interested in what his father had to say.

> They don't talk to me, they talk to my father. They just don't pay attention. Usually they don't. But that time [at the removal ARD], they did pay good attention. [Ricky, Individual Interview, 137]

Sam said he held back his participation because it was not probed by the committee.

> Well, they don't really ask...well, like if they ask me something, I am not one to hold back with my answers. I will flat-out tell you. I don't really care. [Sam, Individual Interview, 57]

Ricky, who had recently had a removal ARD resulting in an extended suspension, indicated that his behavior depended on the type of ARD.

> The last one [the disciplinary removal ARD], we had more people. We had like six or seven people, so I think everybody had to take their turn. I didn't want to interrupt nobody, like that. Yeah. The other ones are one-on-one, talking to each other.
> [Ricky, Individual Interview, 79]

Some students felt more comfortable looking to their parents to determine how to participate, or even process, what is happening in ARD meetings.

> I really go just to hear what they're going to say. I like looking at my parent's reactions, like, "Hmmm, should we do that?" Most of the time I'm sitting in a corner smiling or laughing or something.
> [Thomas, Individual Interview, 126]

Jesus' said his mother expects him to answer questions from the committee. In another example, Ricky said that his dad sometimes became agitated in ARD meetings, but he maintains the expectation that Ricky will attend and will behave respectfully. He said that his father has raised his voice and lost control when problems arose.

> [My father learned] Of me not getting the classes that I need to graduate… Usually they put me in classes that I already had, and I don't need those classes no more. I need to go on to new classes that I haven't took so I can graduate.
> [Ricky, Individual Interview, 97, 99]

From his continued description, father and son seemed to support each other through the process.

> [My father expects] For me not to get like going off or just disturbing it or not paying attention. He expects me to like to say what is on my mind, but not curse or yell or anything like that. And to behave and do a lot of things, I can't remember much. He does, he tells me just to participate in this ARD thing. And I do and I help him out. If they tell him one thing and he didn't get it, I'll help him out with the thing. He yells at them in the ARDs, except at the last one, he didn't do it that much.
> [Ricky, Individual Interview, 91]

At times, African American students responded to the IEP/ITP team in agreement because they perceived that their parents expected this behavior of them, but responses were ambiguous. Each young man mentioned that they were compliant and quiet because that is the behavior that was expected of them, yet each also gave examples of ARDs in which their parents actively sought their verbal input regarding decision-making.

When asked what his mother expected of him, Martin said that he should "sit there and shut up" [Focus Group, 168]. Yet he described the meeting process whereby the teachers asked his mother her opinions about his schedule and she then passed the question to him.

> [Teachers ask] 'So listen, what do you think about next year's schedule?' Then [my mother] looks at me and asks me, 'What do you think about it?'
> [Martin, Individual Interview, 159]

Ron described his behavior in ARDs as "good" because his mother was present. He elaborated by describing good behavior as: "Just get there and nod my head yes" [Focus Group, 142]. But Ron also said his mother tried to elicit responses from him.

> She'll just tell me, 'You're sure you want to be in that?' And I'm like, 'Yeah, I guess,' and she'll go, 'Okay, put him in it.' She just says it's up to me.
> [Individual Interview, 114]

Thomas' response was equally ambiguous. He perceived that his parents wanted him to participate in ARD meetings by sharing his opinions, yet he said he did not like to because he was unaccustomed to this style of communication.

> Well, every question they throw out they want me to participate in it, give my say-so in it. Most of the time I'm not like that. I'm the kind of person, if you're not talking directly to me, I'm not going to say anything. I don't know if my parents raised me up like that or if that just came naturally to me.
> [Thomas, Individual Interview, 146]

Similarly ambiguous, were European Americans' portrayals of their parents' expectations of them. Sam was unsure what his mother expected of him, saying that he was supposed to be respectful, but not elaborating on what exactly that meant to him and his mother. As far as her expectation that he would be an active member of the IEP team, it seems unlikely.

> I don't know if she really expects me to do too much. But maybe like a little bit she does, but not a lot.
> [Sam, Individual Interview, 66]

While Trent said that his parents accepted his role as decision-maker in his own life, he was unsure what would happen if his decisions differed from his parents during an ARD meeting. He said that he doubted whether they would want him to express this type of disagreement verbally during a formal ARD meeting.

Agreeing with the committee. Students gave a number of reasons for agreeing with the committee. Agreeing ranged in the same way that listening ranged, from passive to active. Sometimes students just agreed to just "get finished with" the meeting, other times they agreed because they believed the decision of the committee was the best decision for them.

> Most of the time in an ARD meeting I'm always agreeing, because what they're saying is really true. I need extra help and stuff like that. I'm agreeing with that.
> [Thomas, Individual Interview, 138]

Often students described compliance.

> If they want to put me in a Special Ed class, and I say, 'Okay.' I go along with it … It's okay. I've been in them before. It don't matter.
> [Earl, Individual Interview, 393]

> I just sat there and they did all the paperwork and made sure I agreed with it.
> [Michael, Focus Group, 133]

Ron indicated that he has agreed after he resigned himself to following the teachers' suggestions. He explained his perception that teachers' listened more carefully to his input in the presence of the principal, but that once the principal left the ARD, teachers did not take him as seriously.

> Because the principal leaves the last five or ten minutes of it and that's when they kind of change their mind like, 'No, you should take this class instead of this.' And I'm like, 'Okay,' and I just say yeah.
> [Ron, Individual Interview, 110]

Speaking up. Yet, participants' descriptions of their participation during ARDs were ambiguous and complex. While on one hand they stated that they preferred to listen and interject very little, they also stated that they did participate verbally and they did speak up as they needed to make their voices heard. Students described several situations in which they did speak up and share their ideas or opinions during ARD meetings. Two such situations occurred when students were placed in classes they did not want (in Ron's case) or in classes they had already passed (in Martin's case).

> Only if they put me in classes I don't want to be in. Then I say something… Sometimes…I don't care. But like, Auto Mechanics, I didn't want to take that and I told them no and they put me in something else.
> [Ron, Focus Group, 150]

The participation described by Michael and Forest approached collaboration. Michael recalled at his ARD that the teachers explained the procedures of special education services and asked his opinions on different decisions that were being made. Michael said he was able to give his input during the meeting.

> And I just asked them how things were going to work, if I agreed with this and this… I tell them what I can do, you know. What doesn't confuse me. What I can understand easily and what I learn easier.
> [Michael, Individual Interview, 83, 87]

> Just pretty much listening to what they have to say, answer their questions and I don't know-I'll try to solve some problems.
> [Forest, Focus Group, 105]

Tony also said that he was comfortable providing input and making requests at ARD meetings.

> Yeah [they listen]. It happened before. I said I didn't want to be in that anymore. Got me in OJT. That's why I won't have [inaudible]. I've mostly been in gym a lot. I like gym.
> [Tony, Individual Interview, 76]

Perhaps Tony was bolstered by the support of his mother. He described her role in the meeting.

> She says what she has to say, makes sure that everything will be okay for me. That there's not going to be no trouble along the way.
> [Tony, Individual Interview, 135]

According to Tony his mother expects him to maintain certain behaviors.

> To make sure I say at least the right thing. Like if she wants me to graduate and I say I want to drop out, then that's not what she wants to hear. And I don't want to drop out...
> [Tony, Individual Interview, 137]

In one of the only ARD meetings Earl can remember attending, he was attempting to join the OJT program at his own initiation. In fact, Earl reported that his parents were called after the meeting to get their permission for OJT, since he had attended by himself. Enrolling in OJT was an arduous process and was resolved the following year because at the original meeting he at 15 he was too young for the program.

> And they told me and last year, and I tried and asked them who was [the teacher] and everything. Who was the teacher for OJT? And they wouldn't tell me. So this year I got it… [Then this year] I went to the office and checked. [I got it].
> [Earl, Individual Interview, 164, 166]

Forest also remembered making a request for an accommodation at an ARD meeting, but he did not remember if it was on his IEP.

> I think letting me have a couple of days, if I'm out sick, to have a couple more days to make up the work… Some teachers are like, 'Okay,' and some aren't.
> [Forest, Individual Interview, 168]

Jaime was able to use an opportunity at an ARD meeting to try to get more information on sports scholarships, something he had been trying to accomplish talking to teachers one-on-one.

> I tell them basically that I want to go to college and they say are you going to try to get a scholarship.
> [Jaime, Individual Interview, 11]

So far, however, Jaime said he had not received any information from coaches, teachers, or special education teachers.

Other students also reported the problem that they would make direct requests at ARD meetings and their voices would not be heard, or alternative decisions were made regardless of their input. For example, Jesus had been requesting OJT for two years. At the first ARD the committee asked him to wait. By the second ARD, Jesus had already gotten himself a job, but still he was not placed in OJT.

> Yeah, I just told them that I found a job and if I could get OJT and they said yeah, but they said to wait.
> [Jesus, Focus Group, 151]

> Because they said to wait like a month. And then I went back and told my homeroom teacher like...I just was always telling her. And she was always too busy.
> [Jesus, Individual Interview, 45]

He said he was not going to try a third time. Instead he arranged his work schedule outside of the regular school day.

Ricky reported a similar experience that involved scheduling elective courses.

> Yeah, I tell them that they can put me in the classes to be an auto mechanic, or something like that, but they haven't did it. I tried to do it a couple of years ago, but my folder teacher didn't do it right. He didn't do it at the right time, so I didn't get in to auto mechanics or the ROTC. I didn't get into that either. I wanted to try it, but they didn't put me in it.
> [Ricky, Individual Interview, 67]

In this instance, Ricky said that his father had also made a trip to school to discuss this with the teachers, but no change had been made thus far.

> My dad gets all over [the teacher's] case and they still didn't do it.
> [Ricky, Individual Interview, 71]

Ricky remained perplexed.

> I hope I was [listened to]. I do feel but I don't know about my teacher.
> [Ricky, Individual Interview, 125]

Although Thomas described himself as a reluctant participant, he said that he has participated in discussions in the ARD regarding accommodations he needs. He remembered a situation in an ARD where extra tutoring, inclusion classes, and a separate, quiet setting for working, were all under consideration.

> [The teachers] were like, 'Well, Thomas you need to go outside so you can have more quiet.' I'm the kind of person that I can't be in the classroom working when it's really quiet. I have to have like some noise in the background somewhere because I concentrate a whole lot better.
> [Individual Interview, 140]

Thomas continued to explain that he had difficulty articulating to the IEP team that this accommodation was not appropriate for him. Instead, he wanted permission to use his personal stereo to create background noise.

> It's difficult to tell them because they're the teacher. They're like, 'Well, you know, I don't think so.' I'll say, 'Can I go outside.' When I leave the classroom and go outside I throw on my CD player and just listen to it so I'll have some noise so it can calm me down.
> [Individual Interview, 142]

Other students brought up times when the discussion during ARD meetings was complex and their reticence to participate was more an indication of their confusion or indecision rather than reluctance caused by aforementioned factors. For example, they

might have been uncertain about their positions on decision being made. Such was the case when Sam's ARD committee was deciding whether he should remain in self-contained classes.

> At the time-I don't know-I kind of just didn't want to argue about it, but I kind of agreed with them at the same time that I needed to be in there.
> [Sam, Individual Interview, 182]

One strategy students said they used was to talk to their parents after the meeting. Ron said that if he were going to address ARD related issues, he would wait until after the meeting and talk to his mother about his needs and desires.

> Yeah, I'll talk to my mom later on if she asked me about it. But not all the time. I keep my mouth quiet.
> Ron, Focus Group, 184]

Feelings Associated with ARDs.

Unanimously, students said that the biggest benefit to participating in ARDs was that the meetings "get you out of class." Other students also found ARDs to be beneficial because they provided information about their schedules, and in some cases, opportunities to state their opinions or make requests to the committee.

Students did also report the negative feelings they associated with participating in ARDs. Ron spoke of his frustration because he was portrayed by his teachers as a troubled student. He and Martin agreed that the meetings were long and boring, filled with teacher talk. Thomas brought up the stigma of being "different" from other students.

> The negative things that come out of it. Most of the time you leave like during your next class. You go to class and everybody is like, 'So where were you?' You tell them, 'I was in a meeting.'
> [Thomas, Individual Interview, 150]

Martin said he feels uncomfortable at ARDs.

> I just sit there looking around like...Like why are you people staring at me? … They're not prepared for you. You just sit there for half an hour and then they ask you questions. Half the time you don't know if [the teacher] looks at you, you just be looking around.
> [Martin, Individual Interview, 161, 163]

Ricky and Michael said that the worst part of ARDs were scheduling issues that resulted in lots of changes or being placed in the wrong classes.

> I agree with the person that said 'if I'm passing,'… But say if you have a class where you have all your friends and then if you want this other class they have to switch them. And they put you in all sorts of classes that you have no idea who anybody is. So that would probably be a bad thing, having to start all over with your friends and stuff.
> [Ricky, Focus Group, 192]

> Maybe getting out of class. The worst thing for me-like they'll put you in the same class over and over. You won't get the recommended credits you need. Like your speech and all that, you can't get that.
> [Michael, Focus Group, 196]

Ricky had recently attended an ARD in which he was removed to an alternative educational setting for eight weeks, as punishment for breaking a school rule. He recalled that this meeting was an unpleasant experience for him.

> At the last one was the only one when I didn't I asked questions. They were already going to put me in [disciplinary placement] so I had no kind of voice over what was said.
> [Ricky, Individual Interview, 159]

> It made me feel pretty bad because I don't think [my behavior] was that major, plus I wasn't really meant to hurt-I wasn't trying to hurt anybody. I think they kind of over-exaggerated a little bit too much.
> [Ricky, Individual Interview, 159]

Sometimes students reported meeting-related anxiety.

> I don't know. It just makes me nervous. All of my teachers are in there and they'll be talking about all this stuff that I need and I'll just start getting nervous. The worst thing would probably be getting in trouble. Being embarrassed.
> [Marshall, Individual Interview, 209, 217]

> I thought they were going to talk to my mom and dad about my grades and everything, but it wasn't about it, so...so I didn't have to be nervous anymore.
> [Earl, Individual Interview, 182]

Nevertheless, previous discussion of the purpose of ARDs did result in the students' acknowledgement that potential benefits of attending the meetings, namely being informed and registering their opinions, did exist. Forest said that the potential benefits could be greater.

> It doesn't bother me too much that I have to have those meetings every now and again. I know they're pretty much for the best. Sometimes I expect a little bit more, but I'm pretty sure they're expecting more from me too because sometimes I really don't take care of my stuff every now and again … Try to find out a plan that would fit me best for keeping me on task, I guess.
> [Forest, Individual Interview, 90, 110]

Awareness of Transition Plans

Once the subject of ARD participation had been discussed, students were asked to define the term, "transition plan." The question, "What does the term, transition plan, mean to you?" was answered similarly across groups. At first, participants responded

by saying that they did not know the term. Across groups, they said they had never heard the term. During group and individual interviews, they were encouraged to guess or associate words with the term. Students said ITPs were "graduation plans," "plans for the future," and used to "prepare for the future."

> Isn't that like what you're going to do after high school or something?
> [Jesus, Focus Group, 202]

> A change in the path that you're taking, I guess. Usually they try to make it better for you, easier. I don't know.
> [Forest, Focus Group, 135]

As respondents in groups ventured guesses, the discussions became lively, and a working definition of ITP was established. Once the term transition plan had been defined, few participants were able to identify either components of their own plan; or remembered discussing the topic with teachers.

> As a matter of fact, I think [my teacher's] shown me that. Matter of fact, that day I had met you she had shown me that…Is that like the plans your graduation's on, your graduation plan?
> [DeShawn, Focus Group, 200, Individual Interview, 166]

> I think I've heard it before at the ARD meeting. It's a good thing. He said it right before he changed my schedule…I don't know what they put on it. I know I don't write on it. I know somebody writes on it, but it's not me, so I don't know what they put. I know college is probably on it, but they probably threw like a math major or something.
> [Thomas, Individual Interview, 160, 172]

> Mainly the only thing that she asked me was like are you planning on going to college, and if so, what college? I told her I was planning on going to college, to the Air Force Academy.
> [Trent, Individual Interview, 88]

Yet, confusion remained for some participants. When Earl was asked if any of his teachers had discussed changing from high school to life after high school, he said no. Even if participants could not remember their own transition plans, they could suggest components they thought should be a part of transition plans. Mostly the students thought about making plans for college and employment.

> Yeah, or...yeah. Or like, one of the biggest things is if they are going to go to college or not … A job, like where you are going to try to set you up with a job or something.
> [Sam, Individual Interview, 88, 98]

> Deciding if you're going to live with your parents for a while or not, get your own place, jobs … I don't really think [this] was [on my plan].
> [Forest, Individual Interview, 136, 138]

> How many years you want to go. If you are going to get your Master's degree or Bachelor's… Employment? I'd have a couple of jobs so you know you could pay off your tuitions and books and all that.
> [Michael, Individual Interview, 101, 105]

Participants brainstormed many possible goals or needs that should be a part of transition plans. These included short-range goals that would contribute to long-range goal attainment. For example, Ron stated that he needed help with reading, which is a requisite skill to successfully functioning in an adult world. Working hard, avoiding trouble with the law, passing classes were all mentioned more than once. Students explicitly stated the connection between the short-range needs and the long-range goals. In a discussion about applying for postsecondary programs, Sam mentioned ways to find financial aid. Trent and Tony offered similar suggestions for different reasons.

> Keeping academics up. Being that it looks like you're really involved with school and stuff … Working the same amount of hardness and looking into-really involved with school, and like on your senior year, it would look really good, just like having half days and stuff. You still have like all these electives, so it looks like you are really participating in school.
> [Trent, Individual Interview, 92, 96]

> Make sure [students] graduate… I guess have them after school to study for their homework or tests. Maybe like after school study. Somewhere they can use their time off to help them out a little bit more so that they can be ready for the big old tests.
> [Tony, Individual Interview, 188, 190]

Other identified needs were more clearly aligned with traditional transition domains. For example, DeShawn said that he thought money management, typically considered to be a daily living skill, should be included on transition plans. Few responses addressed transitional skills outside of the domains of school and work (e.g.,, living arrangements, citizenry, and transportation). Each of these suggestions followed questions that prompted participants' thinking about these domains. For example, questions probed students' ability to use various forms of transportation or complete household chores.

> Well, getting prepared and really...they need to know what is going to be taken out of their paycheck and things like that.
> [Sam, Individual Interview, 122]

> Like voting and understanding the laws.
> [Trent, Focus Group, 161]

Another category of possible goals generated by European American participants was how to plan for transitions. Some of the participants thought that it was

relevant to develop students' skills at transition planning. Forest mentioned the importance of developing several plans, a subject he and his uncle had discussed.

> Learn what their goals are … Have more than one goal.
> [Sam, Focus Group, 206, 208]

Still other areas of need were much more vague, and were usually presented as the need to develop a particular work ethic or attitude to help students strive to reach their goals. These included maturity and perseverance.

Students Described Self-Determination Behaviors and Perceptions

Self-determination is a set of interrelated skills that result in a person's ability to make choices and act as a causal agent in his own life. During transition planning, the focus of self-determination is the student's ability to make decisions regarding his future, to set goals, assess progress, and actualize or revise dreams and hopes. While participating in the interviews for this study, students discussed and gave examples of the extent to which they were self-determining. Students also talked about their perceptions of their own self-determination.

According to self-determination literature, students must be familiar with their strengths and weaknesses and use that knowledge to inform their efforts to set, plan, and attain their goals and dreams during transition. This self-knowledge should include students' awareness of disability. Other than directly engaging students in a discussion about ARDs, the subject of disability and/or special education was only pursued if it was initiated by the participants.

Discussing Disability

The word "disability" was only used by three of the 15 participants during the interviews. Each of the three used the word only once, and in such a way to acknowledge that they were students with LD. The phrase "special ed(ucation)" was used seven times by five different participants. The frequency of uses of these terms did not vary significantly between the Latino (two of five) and the African American (one of four) participants, but half of the European American students openly talked about it. Additionally, the significance or meaning of the terms differed slightly.

The only African American student who discussed his disability was DeShawn. He never said he had a learning disability, only that he was in special education. He did not discuss why he was placed in special education. DeShawn talked about his belief that he had been exited before high school and the fact that he had been taking general and advanced courses throughout high school, had not attended an ARD, and did not meet his folder teacher until his junior year. Many of DeShawn's comments revealed that he did not think he needed special education. When asked if he thought he had missed out on any supports during the time he was unaware of his special education status, he said no. He also indicated that special education courses would be too easy for him.

Of the Latino students, Tony and Ricky were the only participants who discussed this topic. Of all the participants, Tony was perhaps the most vocal about

having a disability. He discussed his special needs in the context of high school and potential postsecondary learning environments. He was one of only two students (the other being Forest) who connected the supports he was currently receiving with the services he might need in college.

> [Something that's not too hard]-it has to be hard, that's what studying is for. But since I'm in special ed. I have a little learning disability. I have to have something at my speed to do in college.
> [Tony, Individual Interview, 11]

Ricky's take on disability was a little different. He did talk about needing help at school and he acknowledged certain tasks he found difficult. He also acknowledged that accommodations and modifications had been beneficial to him, but he attributed his poor performance in school, and his label, to his behavior.

> When they were putting me, actually never used to be in Special Ed. In my middle school. And I got in trouble so much that they put into Special Ed. … Because I don't have no kind of learning disorders or whatever you call it. I get stuff very good and, I don't know, they just put me in there. But the first one that they had an ARD with me for me putting in the classroom, for me acting up and I catch on and I explained that it is not just me, it is like a whole bunch of people that were getting into it. One student would start it off and he will get in trouble. I was just saying one thing, but as for the teacher, he'll get me into trouble too. So that was my first ARD. Just about behavior.
> [Ricky, Individual Interview, 119, 121]

Three of the six European American students discussed their disabilities and or special education issues in relation to their current experiences in school. Marshall and Forest discussed their learning disabilities and acknowledged that having LD was a contributing factor both in the difficulties they experienced, and in their attempts to set

and reach goals. They were the only two to talk about what specific subjects or academic skills were relative to their learning disabilities.

> Well, what motivates me to get to school is that I have a disability-to read. Read and write. I want to get better at it because people make fun of me. I want to get better at it so I just get up and keep trying.
> [Marshall, Individual Interview, 269]

> I know I'm good in English, obviously, because it's our language, but I also have a writing disability. So that's kind of hard … So I know when I go to college I'll have to take the basic courses. When it comes to writing, it's weird. It's like I'll leave out words and I'll mis-word things and I won't even realize it, even if I read over it. I know it's going to be hard, but it could be worse.
> [Forest, Individual Interview, 50, 54]

While Sam did not specifically address his learning disability, he did talk a lot about being in special education and he briefly mentioned some of the difficulties he had leading to his placement in self-contained classes. He associated disability with inferiority, saying that getting out of the restrictive special education environment would be improving himself. He indicated that he was able to exert some control over his situation, or to overcome learning difficulties.

> I don't know. I just feel like what I was doing wasn't really the correct thing. It was kind of-I'm in these classes, obviously something's going wrong, so I see the quicker I'm out of these classes, the sooner I see that I have bettered myself.
> [Sam, Individual Interview, 242]

Knowing Strengths and Weaknesses

Although the majority of participants did not explicitly talk about the LD label or special education placement, many revealed their perceptions about their strengths and weaknesses as they pertained to academics. Students across groups talked about

tasks they found difficult and tasks at which they excelled. Students' comments were relevant to postsecondary goals.

For Ron, his difficulty in reading and other academic tasks made him a frustrated high school student. He wondered whether college was for him when he considered his ongoing academic struggles.

> Because it's like hard work and SHS's really hard enough work for me. I'm like barely passing all my classes, even when I do makeup work and all this…. The teachers, they don't explain it right and they just give it to you, and then you get home and you're sitting there looking at your paper forever thinking about it. But I guess-she told me wrong or something-then you go back tomorrow and tell her and she's like, 'I told you this way,' so you've got two different things in your head.
> [Ron, Individual Interview, 80, 82]

Earl had similar concerns. Although he was interested in architecture, he thought that college might not be a realistic postsecondary goal. Of great concern to Earl was the level of academic difficulty he would encounter at the college level.

Latino students were much less likely to bring up specific areas of academic difficulty. These young Latinos were much less specific about any deficits they noticed in themselves. Tony and Ricky referred to becoming nervous or frustrated to the point that they required help from teachers (low threshold for frustration). Jaime acknowledged he was not good at talking about the future, and Michael referred to the shortcomings in his current academic performance (behind on credits). None of these participants, however, identified specific academic difficulties such as speech or reading or math.

Tony, who spoke openly about his disability was an exception. He was aware of some of the ways that LD impacts his academic pursuits and he seemed know what types of accommodations were potentially useful. Furthermore, he specifically connected difficulty and future educational endeavors. He later said that if he found a teacher like this one at the local community college, he would be fine.

> Well, when I was a junior … my folder teacher, she helped me out in a couple of classes. She was around a lot. She was there to help people like me. She helped me out by writing the notes down. She would help me out with the work, like to help me find a page number. Because if I get a little confused she'll show me again.
> [Tony, Individual Interview, 21]

While acknowledgement of weaknesses did factor into students' consideration for setting goals (e.g., whether to attend college), they did not discuss strategies they would use to compensate for their weaknesses while in pursuit of their goals. For example, they did not discuss how they would attempt to compensate for or use strategies to overcome their weaknesses in postsecondary settings.

On the other hand, students from each group identified a wide variety of strengths in themselves. In fact, each participant could identify at least one strength they thought might lead to future employment or pursuit of education. Tony and Ricky said that both they and their parents recognized their sense of responsibility as an asset. Jesus also noted a personal characteristic, a sense of drive, as a strength he possessed. He said that was what kept him in school. Other subject specific strengths were noticed

by Tony (math) and Jesus (mechanics). Earl and Marshall both talked about their creativity.

In particular, African American students talked about how their strengths and aptitudes led them to the identification of career goals. For example, Martin said that his art teacher discussed artistic career options with him because he was the most advanced student and only class member getting credit for Painting III. He said that they had discussed a career in graphic arts. Similarly, DeShawn said that his artistic talent was the driving force behind his intention to pursue a career in architecture. Ron discussed his strengths at his current job, including his ability to deal with customers and his computer skills, and how he would pursue additional retail positions. He wanted to combine his work experience with his knowledge of animal care, a skill he acquired at home taking care of multiple pets, and find a job in a pet shop.

Thomas was the only participant to name his athletic ability as his greatest strength, but he did not disregard his academic strengths, either. Thomas said that he discovered his aptitude for life sciences in the classroom, and that fueled his desire to become a marine biologist. In terms of his athletic pursuits, Thomas spoke of his talent and his drive to improve his skill. He reported that he practiced three to four hours per day. He said that adults and his peers noticed his skill level and that he was sought after as a team member.

> Playing street ball with older guys and everything. When you're young, like my age, 16 and everything, if you score on an older guy you feel proud. You're like, 'If I can do that, imagine what else I can do.' So you just keep doing it over and over and you get happier and happier. I can do this! I can do this!'
> [Thomas, Individual Interview, 86]

Interestingly, Joe equated his lack of squeamish behavior with a strength he would need to become a doctor. He did not say whether he enjoyed or excelled in sciences. Furthermore, he had obvious strengths in athletics, yet he did not mention any sports-related goals.

Forrest and Tony were the only two participants to name academic skills (math) that they identified as both strengths and springboards for careers. Forest would use his math intelligence in business and Tony in teaching. Forest identified strengths from academic experiences. He said he knew math was a strength because understanding it came easy to him even after he missed a lot of school. Similarly, he experienced success in Latin classes.

> I just love translating it and learning the history of it. There's a lot of stuff that I don't know yet that I should know, and there's a lot of stuff that I do know that I shouldn't know yet. I don't know, I've got strong and weak points in Latin.
> [Forest, Individual Interview, 50]

Tony also talked about how he knew math was one of his strong suits.

> Because I used to assist [the teacher] in teaching math, coming around helping people-I teach them how to do that. Because when I first entered her class I already knew all the work. And she said, 'Tony, were you in this class before?' 'No, I never even took this class before.' 'Well, how do you know this stuff?' 'I'm just good.' So I assisted her and that's what inspired me to be a math teacher.
> [Tony, Individual Interview, 42]

Also common, European American students connected what they enjoyed doing with careers they thought about pursuing. For Trent, risk-taking and physically challenging activities were enjoyable, so he wanted a career in the military. Sam recognized his ability to cook and the skills he had developed just by practicing.

> And so now, I can cook a lot better. Now, I used to cook with just some spices. Now, I cook with from like salt and pepper all the way to fresh sage and sesame oil.
> [Sam, Individual Interview, 15]

Understanding Loci of Control

Students touched upon their sources of motivation that contributed to their drive to reach goals, yet this type of discussion sometime revealed that sources of motivation were complex and external/internal identification was difficult. For example, many students across groups said they wanted to be the first in their families to graduate from high school or attend college. Discerning whether they wanted to do this to please themselves and their own desire to achieve those goals, or if they wanted to do this to meet the expectations of parents and family members, or if they were responding to a societal expectation, was unclear. Success, by society's standards (e.g., high school and college diplomas), was important to the students. Martin repeatedly mentioned wanting to be the first in his family to graduate from both high school and college, but he did not elaborate as to whether this was a goal also held by his family, or what other factors may have contributed to his reasons for setting this goal. Ron said high school graduation was important to him because he did not want to be the first in his family

not to do it. Success or failure, as measured by receiving a diploma, could have been a product of an external locus of control, stemming from desire to please parents. On the other hand, this goal could have been a product of an internal locus of control, stemming from the youths' self-worth.

Since dropping out of high school has long been identified with unemployment, perhaps the external loci of control were job availability, salary, and/or security. Ron acknowledged this explicitly.

> The jobs. Because you need a diploma after high school to get kind of a good job or something.
> [Ron, Individual Interview, 316]

"Success" named by the participants, but vaguely defined, was repeatedly identified as a locus of control. Its position as internal or external was difficult to define. Did the students want to be successful because they wanted to feel a sense of accomplishment (internal)? Or did they want to impress others (external)? Participants' comments reveal that both are plausible explanations for their sentiments. For example, Thomas, Martin, and DeShawn discuss the feeling of validation they associate with success.

> Making my shots. I try to shoot a hundred shots before I try to do anything else on the court. So if I miss one I'll start all over. I finally got 100 in a row. I was happy about that. It's mostly like people walking down the street looking at me. I like it when I have the spotlight. So when I see couples or little kids or anything walking down the street they comment, like, 'Hey, you're pretty good' … [With academics] it's mostly the same thing, like teachers, you know, 'That's good work you're doing on your paper.' Most of the time

> when people try to copy off of me, I'm like, 'Okay, I guess I'm doing good I guess. You want to copy off me.'
> [Thomas, Individual Interview, 88, 94]

> I think what motivates people is like to succeed, to become the best.
> [Martin, Individual Interview, 207]

> Yeah, [winning art competitions] made me like want to do more. Plus it's just something I want to do good.
> [DeShawn, Focus Group, 66]

Proving oneself to others was also mentioned, in particular when failure experiences had occurred. While Ron gave an example that losing a basketball game only made him want to practice harder, DeShawn spoke of proving that he could support himself and that his artistic talent was significant.

> To me, I always got put down or something. So that's kind of making me go forward … People always said that that's not life or something. You know, something that would make you not want to do it anymore. They say, 'That's not life. That's not how you make it.' You've got to do something bigger than that. That's what I want to do. To me, I'll show them. That's something I can do and I can make a living on doing it.
> [DeShawn, Focus Group, 338, 340]

Marshall wanted to disprove his peers who made fun of him because of his reading difficulties. He spoke of his inner drive to reach that goal and others, comparing his attempts to be a strong reader to his attempts to be an excellent motocross cyclist.

> I don't know. Somebody said to me if you fall off, get back on it and try harder. So every time I fell off my bike I would get back on it and keep trying until I got it right.
> [Marshall, Individual Interview, 279]

Meeting goals was also fueled by intellectual challenge. When students talked about this, however, they discussed the ill-effect of classes that were too easy or expectations that were too low.

> First of all, in English I really don't like that teacher. We always read these stupid little kid stories and have to do tests over them and I think it's just pointless. Like English has been repeating itself pretty much since the 6th grade. It's just the same thing over and over again and it's getting pretty boring. I don't like reading too much about stuff that I'm really not interested in.
> [Forest, Individual Interview, 48]

Students from each group stated that their career goals were driven by a sense of enjoyment they got from the activity.

> [My mother and grandmother] say that's a big dream to become a teacher; it's a big responsibility. I know. [inaudible] for a little bit. I love the feeling of the teaching and I feel it's what I would like to do because I like it.
> [Tony, Individual Interview, 58]

> [Cooking's] something I enjoy. It's not something I'm doing for money. It's something I do because I like it. And I think that would help me to maybe tolerate certain things just a little bit more.
> [Sam, Individual Interview, 252]

> I just like being challenged. I don't like being bored and not doing anything. I have to have something exciting. That's why I like going rock-climbing and stuff like that.
> [Trent, Individual Interview, 11]

External loci of control commonly mentioned were fulfilling parents' wishes or expectations and the need to earn money. For example, Michael mentioned that seeing the material wealth of his uncle and wanting that for himself and his family was a source of motivation. For Ron, DeShawn, and Martin, money has been a major

motivator for the jobs they have held during high school. And in terms of transition and postsecondary education, Ron brought up the cost of college.

> If I want to go or not go. Because you can't just like quit after you go because you've spent all this money on books and all this.
> [Ron, Individual Interview, 247]

Another external locus of control is the requirement and structure provided by the court system, parents, and/or school.

> I'm not on full probation; I'm on conditions of release, and I got … the meanest judge, and she gets on me about not passing. She threatens to lock me up and I have to see her in two months and I know it's going to be pretty bad because I didn't pass this last six weeks too well, but I can talk to her and tell her I'm going to go to summer school, because I'm probably going to have to do that if I don't do good on these three six weeks coming up. Plus, it's not like [juvenile detention] is a scary place; it's just so boring. It just makes you wish you were back in school, pretty much, being able to be free with your friends.
> [Forest, Individual Interview, 96]

Forest frequently acknowledged needing more control or structure to motivate him to reach short-range goals of staying out trouble and completing academic tasks, although he also mentioned the discomfort he associated with these controls.

> It feels like they're trying to give me too much structure, like the court. Because I mean, I really know what's expected of me and nothing they can do really is going to make me change except for myself, but they think different. It's really bothering me having to have a mentor and counselors and all these court dates always coming up, and PO visits and stuff like that.
> [Forest, Individual Interview, 186]

Ricky talked about the structures used to enforce compliance at the alternative school he attended during suspension. He said that he responded well to the atmosphere

once he accepted the fact that he could not get around the requirements for silence and task completion. He did complete the program more quickly than the original requirement, making him eligible to return to CHS, a fact about which he was proud.

Decision-Making

Students discussed a wide range of decision-making opportunities they encountered. Some of the decisions they gave as examples were relatively mundane and occurred everyday (e.g., decisions about grooming); others were more grand-scale and involved important decisions that had long-term implications for futures planning (e.g., decisions about dropping out). Also, decisions students talked about addressed both home-related and school-related choices.

In general, students across groups perceived that they were their own key decision makers. Students occasionally made comments that explicitly revealed that other people, such as their parents/guardians or teachers, had influence or control over their decision-making authority. Implicit in their comments, however, were subtle remarks that indicated the influence of important adults in their decision-making process.

School-related decisions. Students agreed that they made decisions related to school, for the most part, for themselves. This included deciding whether or not to dropout, to complete work, and/or to attend class. Jesus said that if he made the

decision not to do his work, he would suffer the natural consequences: failure. As far as his parents are concerned, he said they would be mad but they would not take action.

> Not really. Just like tell me that I am going to be in summer school or something like that.
> [Jesus, Individual Interview, 267]

> Going to class, not being tardy, doing my work in there, getting along with the students and the teacher, getting help if I need it, maybe going to tutorials or Saturday school. There's a lot of options. Talking to the teacher one-on-one to see if there's some way you can bring up your grade.
> [Forest, Individual Interview, 152]

Following school rules was also up to the students, according to them.

> I don't know. Like not to get in trouble, go to all my classes, be on time, stuff like that.
> [Marshall, Individual Interview, 241]

> Most of the time if it's like a big decision, I let my parents handle that. But if it's like small, do I want to get off campus and have a chance at getting an off-campus ticket, I make decisions like that.
> [Thomas, Individual Interview, 198]

Ricky provided an example where his father explicitly asked him if he intended on staying in school following the ARD decision to remove him to an alternative campus, which resulted in extending Ricky's high school career by one semester.

> He did put it on me.
> [Ricky, Individual Interview, 167]

Ultimately, Ricky decided not to drop out.

> Yeah, I am trying to meet that goal! I hope I do. I know I am not going to drop out even if I do come a couple of more years, I still will be in high school and graduate. I won't ever stop trying to pass, because I want to… Hopefully [I'll make it], I know I won't pass this year because of ALC.
> [Ricky, Individual Interview, 226, 228]

Although DeShawn, Ron, and Martin all agreed that they were the ones who decided whether to wake up and get to school, Thomas said that his parents made that decision for him. He said that he used to try to stay at home but his parents physically brought him to school against his will. And although Ron said that attending school was his decision, he also talked about conflicts between him and his mother on this matter. While he may have made the ultimate decision, it was not without her corrective feedback and threat of punishment (e.g., loss of telephone privileges). Ultimately, Ron decided to make up credits he lost as a result of skipping.

> And I go to Saturday school for [No Credits] too. It clears up NCs for no credits. So I didn't have two credits from my sophomore year, so that cleared that up, too to help me.
> [Ron, Individual Interview, 170]

But when probed, some students said that their autonomy only went so far, and that their parents would react with some type of coercive action if they disagreed with their sons' decisions. For example, although Earl said going to school is up to him, he said his parents exercised control if he skipped.

> They make me go to school because they don't want me to get like I did last year. I missed too many days of school and didn't pass and everything.
> [Earl, Individual Interview, 367]

Selecting courses, graduation plans, and extracurricular activities were also listed by students as choices within their own decision-making power.

> Usually [teachers] tell us what math we want. We want Pre-AT, we want regular, we want like Physics, Geometry or Algebra, whatever it is. They just tell us on a piece of paper what do we want and usually I try picking a little bit higher level than what I think I can handle.
> [Joe, Individual Interview, 97]

Students also said they made scheduling and OJT decisions.

> Well, I'm not going to stop looking for work. I don't need to take no more classes because I got everything I need right now if I can pass Government. I'll stay in OJT just to shorten my classes because I don't need no extra.
> [Tony, Individual Interview, 82]

In DeShawn's case, the decision to enroll in OJT was made after he began living on his own. In fact, he said his parents did not even know, that with the help of his special education case manager he got into the program. Ron agreed and said he made the decision to join the program after obtaining permission from his mother. She, however, deferred to his preference and said, "It's up to you" [Focus Group, 299].

Also left up to Ron was the decision to rearrange his class schedule to accommodate his work schedule through OJT. When teachers noticed he was sleeping through English class or not attending at all, the VAC approached him with a plan.

> I hated first period and that was the only English they could put me…
> Because [the English teacher] went up to [the VAC] and said, 'Take him off of OJT because he's never coming to my class.' And [the VAC] said, 'If you [don't miss more than] six days and you pass her class for this semester I'll take you and put you on OJT for first period, too.' And I said, 'Okay, that's a deal.' So we made a bet and then I passed it.
> [Ron, Individual Interview, 203, 207]

Once in the OJT program, other decisions the students said they made included arranging work and early-release times, and participation in clubs, whose schedules likely conflicted with work schedules.

> Well, if I was going to be in [ROTC] this year I couldn't have OJT or after school stuff.
> [Earl, Individual Interview, 304]

Sam was the only student who talked about making decisions regarding the type of special education placement he received. He was in self-contained because, according to him, he was engaging in self-mutilating behaviors. He had mixed feelings about the self-contained program, but he was leaning toward leaving that setting.

> Yeah. I was thinking, 'Man, I really don't want to be in here,' but I probably should be at the same time. I'll probably express myself [at the next ARD] on getting out.
> [Sam, Individual Interview, 184, 188]

Sam said that he would make an argument for a less restrictive setting by providing examples of his good behavior. When probed whether he preferred the teachers to make the final decision, he said no.

> No. I think I should be able to decide it for myself, and if I can't, then yeah, but I think I can decide.
> [Sam, Individual Interview, 194]

Forest is the only student who related decisions he made in school to some of the postsecondary transition issues he had been considering.

> I know it's my choice to do good in school. I know it's my choice to take care of my stuff, to get in contact with that dude with the company. I know it's my responsibility to find people to help me get started. I need to find a distributor that I can, I guess, cope with. I need to find a location. Just all kinds of stuff.

[Forest, Individual Interview, 142]

Home-related decisions. Other decisions students said they made pertained to their home lives. Across groups, participants talked about making decisions students mention daily living decisions such maintaining hygiene and personal appearance (e.g., styling hair) and keeping their schedules. Ricky said he made all his own decisions because he has "good responsibility" [Focus Group, 241]. Jaime said that his decisions are wide-ranging.

> Like I get up early in the morning and I go to school. If I want to do something after school, I just do this. I get up early to go to church. I'll get up late if I want to. Sometimes I make my own decisions. Not every time.
> [Jaime, Focus Group, 247]

> Pretty much I get to do whatever I want. I don't know-deciding when you eat, deciding what you do with your time, deciding to help in the house or something. Pretty much everything.
> [Forest, Focus Group, 174]

Across groups several mentioned that they were able to make decisions about how they spent money.

> What kind of stuff you want like decisions when you have money. Like you want this...a CD player or a stereo. I can save money and buy something else…
> [Joe, Focus Group, 170]

> Sometimes. I just don't buy junk. I said I wanted a CD player. I like electronic stuff so that's what I buy.
> [Ricky, Focus Group, 271]

Participants across groups also talked about making decisions that had potentially serious consequences, such as following house rules and public laws.

> How far I can drive without a permit. I drive up to [the grocery] and then go back home. Cause I don't want to [inaudible] a wreck.
> [Martin, Focus Group, 330]

> Home life-whether or not I listen to my mom, and other things-I don't know if I should come home early or not… Or stay out later and just suffer the consequences. That's happened once or twice.
> [Sam, Individual Interview, 220, 222]

> Weekends, going to parties, you know. My parents also have a say so in that, but I always have the final word. They'll let me go. Most of the parties that I go to there's lots of alcohol or illegal drugs. My decision is-they're like, 'Take a hit off some weed; get high.' They end up having the cops raid the party and then I get in trouble for illegal substance or alcohol because I'm a minor. So I make decisions like that.
> [Thomas, Individual Interview, 206]

As comments from Jaime and Thomas suggested, participants did not always act autonomously. Ron and his mother reached a mutual decision about curfew. She chose the time and he abided, given some leeway and incentive.

> Well, my mom tells me to come in at 11:30. I've got to be back in the neighborhood by 11:00, 11:30 to eat and so on. It's kind of on me. She cooks and I eat it.
> [Ron, Individual Interview, 217]

Forest said he made other decisions because of the threat of punishment if he broke his probation agreement. His mother, who lived with Forest and his grandmother intermittently, would be instrumental in making this decision.

> The only thing I really don't decide is when I come home, because I have to be home at 9:00…[This was decided by] the court. And I don't want to break that because I know my mom will call the probation officer on me.
> [Forest, Individual Interview, 148]

While Latinos and African Americans did not mention peer selection decisions, European Americans said they had the ability making decisions regarding whom they chose as friends. Sam and Trent both mentioned this role.

> I guess buying stuff, like he said. Decide to give stuff. Who you decide to be with, like relationship wise, decide your friends.
> [Forest, Focus Group, 180]

Joe specifically said he was in charge of deciding the type of girlfriend and friends he wanted and alluded to other choices relative to socializing.

> You've got your friends you've already made and then you get [inaudible] around the school, and then you have more decisions- decide which soda you want, and then you talk to your friends.
> [Joe, Focus Group, 186, 188]

DeShawn's comments reflected the fact that his decision-making responsibilities were more far-reaching than other students. He the most independent of the four young men, as he had been on his own for one year. During this time, he was responsible for all aspects of his life including maintaining a daily work schedule and paying bills. The initial decision to move out of his parents' house was his own, although he said that he "didn't really want to" take this step [Focus Group 313].

> … my father and I didn't want them to split up, you know? So I decided to do it on my own.
> [DeShawn, Individual Interview, 26]

Deferring to Adults and Seeking Help

Although participants gave numerous examples of the types decisions they made for themselves, they also gave examples of decisions they needed help making.

Sometimes they discussed ways in which they would ask their parents/guardians, or other important adults, to help them weigh consequences of decisions and select their best options. Other times, they would discussion specific types of assistance they needed from these same people to make their goals and dreams become realities.

Deferring to adults. At times, participants across groups found it necessary, or less uncomfortable, to defer to their parents' opinions and actions rather than to take action on their own behalves. In particular, Thomas mentioned that he had confidence in the school-related decisions his parents made for him and that having them consider educational issues was a comfort to him.

> Like if the teacher calls my house and she wants to change me to like a different class period, I'll let my parents handle that. They know me a lot better. They're like, 'Well, that's early in the morning. I know Thomas and he probably wouldn't go early in the morning.' They'll say, 'Switch him to the afternoon.'
> [Individual Interview, 202]

> To me, it's best left up to my mom and dad, but you know, at the school they also have a say so in it. If they don't want me to be in a classroom with two teachers, my parents are like, 'All right. Thomas, you can go to a different school,' a school that would really like accept me.
> [Individual Interview, 240]

Similarly, when considering the self-contained classroom, Sam said that if he felt unsure of what to do, he would go with his mother's decision, rather than his teachers'. Wanting parents to take control of the decision-making process was not limited to the realm of school-life. For example, Marshall said most decisions (e.g., what time to go to bed) were up to his mother. Martin wanted his parents to make custody decisions.

> My real dad comes to get me. [My father, mother, and stepfather] are always arguing over who is going to go with who for the holidays. They always want to ask me and I just get mad and leave. I just want them to make a decision.
> [Martin, Focus Group, 400]

Another example of participants' willingness to acquiesce to parents' decisions was when Earl said that he made his own financial decisions. He later stated that his mother controlled that decision-making process to a certain extent.

> Right now my mom is taking half of my money. So, she's paying bills and everything.
> [Earl, Individual Interview, 126]

While Latino students did discuss situations in which they deferred to the parents and/or other family members, few of these situations involved school matters. For example, they said they followed their parents' wishes when it came to church attendance, curfews, and chores.

Seeking help. At times, participants across groups found it necessary to seek help from parents/guardians, extended family members, and teachers. Siblings and peers were not generally mentioned as people to whom participants looked for support other than advice. The type of help they sought, however, did seem to vary across groups. European Americans talked about asking their parents to take action on school related matters more than participants from the other two groups. In some cases, the help they sought supplemented their own efforts. Earl had a situation in which his credits were not what he anticipated, and while he made some effort to straighten out the problem, he also enlisted his mother.

> I've been here for three years. I should be in the 11th and I'm not. I'm trying to fix that with the attendance lady and everything, because my mom's going to come up here and talk to them.
> [Earl, Individual Interview, 310]

In another situation at school, Earl needed his parents to help him with an OJT scheduling conflict. He was having trouble arranging an off-campus pass for his work hours.

> I went to the office every time I needed to go to work. I called my mom and dad to see if I needed to go to work today. I called them and they said, 'Yes, we need you'… [My father] called them to check if I needed to go work today, and they said yes. He took me over to the attendance lady's office and got me a pink slip to leave campus.
> [Earl, Individual Interview, 206]

On the contrary, when African American students encountered problems at school (e.g scheduling errors and compliance with IEP accommodations) they did not talk about asking their parents to go to school and act on their behalves. For example, when Martin wanted to take Spanish and did not get placed in the class, his solution was to sign up the next year. When again he was not placed in the class, he did not mention that any further action was taken, either by him or his mother. All mention of other scheduling changes by both DeShawn and Ron seemed also to be handled directly by the students themselves. And in Thomas's case, he stated his need for accommodations, but when they were not included on the IEP, his response was to take action independently and informally. Exceptions to this included an incident in which DeShawn wanted to visit the community college campus during his regularly scheduled

work hours. In this case, his father helped him by calling his employer and arranging for the absence.

In the same way, Latino participants said they handled school-related issues without asking their parents to come to school. When Jesus and Tony had difficulty working out the details of OJT placement, they each addressed their concerns with their teachers without the assistance of their parents. Ricky indicated he might have been an exception to this, however, when he talked about his father's repeated efforts to make schedule changes on his behalf.

Evidence that participants across groups sought help, either in the form of advice or action, from their teachers and other school personnel, was sparse. Rather, support from teachers, as mentioned earlier, was more commonly initiated by teachers and limited to discussion of students' strengths and their motivation to pursue a degree or career. Participants identified one key transition planning area, obtaining employment, where they needed help from school personnel. Michael and Tony both needed help finding employment and both were concerned about financial issues. Tony seemed to need a job more urgently because he had been looking for a long time on his own. Interestingly, he was in OJT, but he said that the teacher allowed him to help the football coach as an assistant, rather than a paying job, without failing the class.

> The gym was my idea, but OJT-I told them about looking for work during the summer but I never found work yet, so they said they'll keep me on OJT until I found work… I sign my name on a board to show my OJT thing. And for my work thing I just say I'm looking. I've tried so many places.
> [Tony, Individual Interview, 78, 99]

DeShawn's efforts to shape his curriculum for his senior year by working with the VAC and arranging his participation in the OJT program. Ron also engaged in conversations with the VAC at SHS regarding his participation in OJT. Although the subject of school counselors came up several times, students did not report the use of this resource for assistance with transition planning.

Self-Advocating

Whether participants mentioned seeking the help and advice from adults or deferring to the wishes or decisions of their parents/guardians and family members, they reportedly took opportunities to advocate for themselves. Race/ethnic group membership did not seem to be a factor in participants' perceptions that they were responsible for acting on their own behalves in school-related matters. Many of these efforts, such as Earl's efforts to get enrolled in OJT, involved talking to teachers and other school personnel about getting into the classes they wanted.

> And if I don't get it this year, they were going to put me into regular classes like the others. If I didn't come and ask him. But if I did, I would have got OJT so I went over there to ask him. And what else?
> [Earl, Individual Interview, 188]

> I remember telling them that I wanted biology so I could find out things and I wanted life science.
> [Joe, Individual Interview, 51]

In another example, Martin was placed in a class for which he already had credit and he took it upon himself to tell his teacher and counselor that a mistake had been made and that he needed a different course.

Other efforts students took to self-advocate included negotiating grades and work requirements with classroom teachers, or, in the cases of participants in OJT, making arrangements to accommodate both work and school schedules.

> I talked to two or three of my teachers to see if I can bring up my first six weeks grades because some of those are pretty bad.
> [Forest, Individual Interview, 154]

Some of the examples of students' participation in ARDs were also categorized as efforts to self-advocate. In the following two examples, Ron and Thomas explained how they reacted when they and their teachers experienced conflicts that required them to make their voices heard.

Ron described an ARD meeting when a teacher told his mother that he did not do makeup work that he was sure he had already completed.

> Sometimes I don't agree because like one time I had an ARD and [the teacher] was like I never do makeup work. I was like, 'I always do make up work.' And she was like, 'When was the last time you did make up work?' and I was like, 'A couple of days ago.' She looked it up and I did make up work. She was like, 'Oh, never mind.' She had it marked on a little paper or something so she erased it. She said, 'Oh, you do make up work.'
> [Ron, Individual Interview, 136]

While Ron was able to express his point of view and come to an agreement with the teacher, Thomas's self-advocacy efforts resulted in taking actions without consent of

his teachers. Although his ARD committee acknowledged that he needed a separate setting to concentrate, his request to list to a personal stereo for background noise, an accommodation that he said increased his ability to concentrate, was not resolved.

> My teachers really don't like it when I listen to my CD player. They'll see me walking in the hall with my CD player on and they'll be like, 'Thomas, why aren't you in class?' I'm like, 'I have a pass.' Then they see my CD player. 'Why are you listening to your CD player?' I'm like, 'I'm in the hallway.'
> [Thomas, Individual Interview, 144]

Joe said he wanted to hear what teachers had to say about him so that he could interject "the truth" as he saw fit, and he gave an example this type of participation. Sam found it necessary to reject scheduling recommendations from the ARD committee.

> Most of the time I'll just shake my head and they'll be like, 'Oh, we can change that.' And then they'll change it. It's pretty easy I just sit there and nod my head the whole time.
> [Sam, Focus Group, 117]

Many of the experiences Latino students shared about their self-advocating behaviors occurred during special education implementation. In ARD meetings students demonstrated that they tended to speak up and voice requests about scheduling and accommodations. Ricky spoke about getting a credit audit from the data processing office at school so that he could make sure he is on track for graduation. Jaime said he received the same information by checking in with his folder teacher.

Self-advocating in these situations seemed to be an arduous process with mixed results. In many cases students needed to repeat their needs or desires. And even with

the most vigilant students, self-advocacy efforts did not always have the desired effect. As Jesus explained why he gave up on getting enrolled in OJT, Ricky gave him some advice.

> That's what I do. I kept talking to my folder teacher every day, kept bugging them and they did it. So, don't have my 7th period. The only one I have four, but they had gave me six [periods].
> [Ricky, Focus Group, 155]

This seemed to be a small consolation to Jesus, however, because he decided not to pursue the issue.

> You just go to all that trouble, go to those meetings and stuff.
> [Jesus, Focus Group, 171]

Tony also had a strategy for self-advocacy, which was very similar to Ricky's, but seemed more complex.

> Well, when I come in the classroom [the teachers] already know me by heart and they don't even know anybody else, and I feel like, wow, they sure know me even if they don't know anybody else. And then I start talking to them about this and that. When they ask questions I tell them about myself. Every day I keep telling them what goes on with my life or something. Like I tell Ms. B every day and Mr. D every day that I still haven't gotten my school jacket yet or my senior shirt yet. They keep asking about that and they try to help me out with it the best they can or my class schedule, too.
> [Tony, Individual Interview, 15]

Self-Determination Thwarted

Although participants across groups were able to share many ways in which they practiced self-determination or component skills, they also gave examples of times in which adults overruled the decisions or actions they made. Participants gave more examples of adults overriding their decisions at school than at home. In fact, Latinos

gave virtually no examples of their parents/guardians and other family members enforcing decisions alternative to ones they had made for themselves. Even when Tony stated that he said what his mother wanted to hear only of plans to graduate, not to drop out, he said that he and she actually shared the same goal. For African Americans and European Americans, decisions to drop out were overridden by parents' efforts to physically take students to school.

Situations in which students' decision-making was thwarted or overturned, however, did happen in the context of school. In these situations students tried to advocate for themselves, but school personnel, did not facilitate their efforts. For example, after the first semester of his senior year and fulltime OJT program, DeShawn missed being in the classroom and approached his special education case manager and asked to return to school for part of the day. The teacher explained that she could not honor DeShawn's request.

> Yeah, going to class, listening to other people, learning stuff. Because at work I don't learn nothing at all; I just work. So I miss that. Being around a whole lot of people, talking and getting to know people. I miss that…[My teacher] was like, 'I can't. That would mean I would have to put you in all special ed classes.' And I was like, 'Well, that's not going to be nothing because I'll just pass them.' I'll be the only one that's finishing all my work.
> [DeShawn, Individual Interview, 104, 110]

When Martin tried to address the situation regarding his enrollment in a Spanish class, he tried to sign up for the class and did not get it. When that did not work, he

tried to discuss the situation with school personnel, but he remained confounded by the situation.

> No [I did not find out why I didn't get the class]. If I try to go in there, they are like, 'You need to come back to us later. We are very busy right now.'
> [Martin, Individual Interview, 126]

Trent attempted to have general education teachers follow his IEP accommodations and some refused. He then tried to enlist the support of his special education case manager, who was unavailable when he needed her. In this case, if he decided he needed to use an extended deadline for an assignment (the accommodation), he could not.

> Not right now [I'm not behind on my work]. There was for a little while, but I just got a late grade on it.
> [Trent, Individual Interview, 82]

Many of the decisions students tried to make for themselves were not supported by any real power the student had to bring about the desired outcome. Students tried to exercise control in their school lives by signing up for programs such as OJT, attempting to graduate early, or obtaining information that could inform their goals and plans for the future. One example was Ricky's attempt to make up hours in order to keep his graduation plan on schedule. This arrangement never came to fruition, however, and Ricky did not seem to understand exactly why.

> I tell the ARD that I would like to go to an after-school program, in the mornings, at lunch. I even am trying to go to a, what do you call it, where you make the hours, you go and do....community service? There you go, community service. So I could make up some work. [Ricky, Individual Interview, 242]

The resolution of conflicts and the extent to which students were self-determining differed between home and school settings. Conflicts at home seemed to result in shared power with parents and final decision-making resting in the hands of students.

Students said that ultimate decisions to comply with their parents and exercise self-determination were up to them. DeShawn did not want to move out but after careful consideration, he and his father decided it was the best option. After his move, his father maintained a supportive role in his life, and DeShawn continued to request his help. Although Ron exercised self-determination by not attending school, his mother influenced his compliance with attendance rules. Ultimately, though, he said he decided to finish and he made the effort to make up unexcused absences in Saturday School.

Document Reviews

Fifteen of the original 17 document reviews were included in my analysis. Since Wyndell and Gilberto did not complete either a focus group or individual interviews, I did not include analysis of their ITPs. The main focus of this data collection activity was to use the ITP as another source of information regarding the self-determination behaviors and perceptions of students. First, I examined them for evidence that the

goals and objectives included opportunities for self-determination. Although the information I gathered could not tell me whether students used these opportunities or fulfilled the roles and responsibilities that were outlined on the ITP, I wanted to see if these possibilities existed. For example, I wanted to know if the ITP goals were written using student-first language. Was the goal to get a driver's license written as "Student will study the driver's education manual and take a practice written driving test," or was it stated as "Enroll student in driver's education." Further, I wanted to see if students were named as persons responsible for completing transition objectives. Did the ITP list students as members of the "network of support" who was charged with taking action toward ITP goals?

Secondly, I was interested in how closely the students' statements about their dreams and hopes, as well as visions, of their futures matched what was contained on the ITP. If, during an interview, the student said they intended on going to a four-year university, was that on their ITP? Many possible scenarios could impact the extent of the match between students' statements and what was recorded on the ITP; and reasons for match or mismatch were not necessarily revealed during the interviews or document reviews. Nevertheless, I wanted to ascertain whether the students' ideas were represented on the ITP, which is the stated intent of legislation and regulation regarding formal transition planning.

Lastly, my intention was to use the information from the ITPs in the triangulation of data. I wanted to verify what the students said during interviews by reviewing the extent to which their input could be confirmed by what had been recorded during ITP meetings. In other words if they said they went to ITP meetings, I wanted to see if they signed as committee members.

General descriptions of ITPs

Each of the participants in the study had an ITP, as required by federal special education guidelines. Of the 15 ITPs included in this analysis, four were out of compliance at some point since their initial generation because the dates between ITPs and their updates exceeded one year. Three of the four cases were ITPs for Latino students, and one was that of a European American.

During the school year when data were collected (2002-2003), the district had just begun requiring the transition supplement to the IEP. During my reviews several teachers said they were "just learning new forms." In fact only seven participant folders contained this supplemental form, five of which were from CHS and two from SHS. Field High School had not yet begun to use the form. Two of the students (Jaime and Ricky) had ITPs that were older than one year, but they did have an updated supplemental form, which stated exit goals without transition objectives. The other two students (Joe and Tony) had current ITPs that had not been updated within a calendar year at some point during their high school careers.

In addition to checking the dates of the ITPs, I verified that ITPs were generated when participants were 16 years old, as IDEA (1997) requires. All ITPs had been generated before participants turned 17, with great variation, splitting the group between those who had an ITP before age 16 (n=5), and those who had one before age 17 (n=9). Ricky, an exception, had his first ITP when he was 14. All African American participants fell into the later group, as did two European Americans and three Latinos. Table 4.2 indicates how many participants in each group had signed the ITPs. This tabulation includes signatures for the most recent meeting and dated version of the ITP only and is represented by percentages of the entire group. (There were four African Americans, six European Americans, and five Latinos.)

Table 4.2
Percentages of Member Signatures on Most Recent ITPs

Group	Student signature	Parent/ guardian signature	Special education teacher signature	General education teacher signature	VAC signature
African Americans	100%	100%	75%	75%	0%
European Americans	83%	83%	100%	83%	0%
Latinos	100%	60%	100%	40%	0%

Opportunities for Self-Determination

Documentation of self-determination opportunities on the ITP included a checklist to record "steps taken to ensure student's preference and interest." Examples

of obtaining students' input included student presence at the meeting, an interview, a preference survey, a functional vocational evaluation, and/or telephone contact. Joe was the only student who did not attend his most recent ITP meeting. All other students had signed their ITPs, but in many cases the box marked "Student attended meeting" was not checked.

Only a handful of students across groups participated in an interview or a student preference survey according to the record on their ITPs. One African American, one European American, and two Latinos participated in interviews, but generally the results were not included in the special education folder. The date of Jaime's interview was two years prior to the current ITP. Other ITPs did not contain dates for this activity. Only two European Americans and one Latino had record of completing an interest survey. In Forest's folder the results of the survey were attached to the ITP, but the responses were written in the folder teacher's handwriting and was dated the day prior to the first his initial ITP meeting. Functional vocational evaluations and telephone contact were also included on the list of ways teachers should attempt to obtain student input in transition planning. These two options were not checked for any participants; however, one ITP (Jaime's) indicated that an informal functional vocational evaluation had been completed or planned.

The goals and objectives tended to be uniform rather than individualized. Rather than using a blank ITP form, teachers at all three schools had copied a master list of

ITP objectives for each student. Analysis of ITP goal statements revealed that few of the goals contained student-first language or statements that required a student to take action on his own behalf. The goal and objective statements themselves were worded in such a way that implied they were goals for teachers, rather than students. For example, goals such as "Provide academic instruction for independent living" or "Discuss vocational programs to support employment" seemed to imply that the teacher was the intended causal agent. Other goals, such as "Explore community participation" were more vague; the party responsible for this goal was unclear. The column marked "Network of support" listed who was responsible for goal attainment. The student was only listed in this column a handful of times, and almost exclusively in the domain of leisure and recreation in conjunction with goals such as, "Participate in leisure activities." The most common scenario was that no one was listed in this area. The second most frequent occurrence was either the school district or the parent.

Agreement Between ITP Goals and Interviews

During interviews, participants were asked to state what they wanted to do in the future. Initial questions were open-ended and did not limit student responses to specific transition domains, but discussions about postsecondary education and career goals dominated both focus group and follow up conversations. In the domain of postsecondary education, predetermined choices listed on ITP forms included: university, community college, vocational/technical school, junior college, day

program, continuing education in adult living skills, and military. The last three in the above list were not used for any participant in this study. Since all of the participants in this study mentioned going to college (except for Trent, who specified military academy), Table 4.3 shows the postsecondary exit expectations from participants' ITPs only. On many ITPs more than one option had been checked, therefore the data in the table (organized by race/ethnic group) represents the percentage of total recommendations per group. Seven options were recorded for four African Americans, 10 for six European Americans, and seven for five Latinos.

Table 4.3
Postsecondary Educational ITP Goals by Participant Group

Participant group	Vocational/ technical	Community college	Junior college	University
African American	43%	29%	14%	14%
European American	20%	40%	10%	30%
Latino	14%	43%	29%	14%

Employment responses, both from interviews and from document reviews, contained much more variability. Table 4.4 shows group results of congruency between stated career goals and ITP career expectations. A match was recorded if the student and the document had at least one goal in common. A mismatch was used to describe situations in which students' statements and their ITPs did not contain any goals in common. A third category, termed "None listed," was used to describe situations in

which no career goal was listed on the ITP. Results are expressed by groups and represented by percentages.

Table 4.4
Congruency of ITP Career Goals on and Interview Responses

Participant group	Match	Mismatch	None listed
African American	50%	25%	25%
European American	33%	17%	50%
Latino	40%	20%	40%

Students also mentioned goals as they related to independent living, recreation, and other domains. At times, the students did not initiate discussion on this topic; rather, interview questions prompted them to think about these other domains. A comparison between students' comments and ITP statements revealed that many mismatches occurred in the domain of independent living. While ITP forms listed choices ranging in amount of support from living independently without support, to living in group homes, the only choices articulated on ITPs were independent living with no support, independent living with support, and living with family. The only choices articulated by participants were either living independently or living at home. Congruency occurred at different rates across groups. Table 4.5 details the congruency in this area. The final two columns illustrate the nature of the incongruency for cases in which a mismatch existed.

Table 4.5
Congruency of ITP Residential Goals and Interview Responses

Participant group	Match	Student expected family support	School expected increased support
African American	75%	25%	0%
European American	50%	33%	17%
Latino	40%	40%	20%

In terms of recreational and leisure activities, students' comments and ITP goals reflected the pervasive sense by both ITP committees and students themselves that this domain would be pursued independently. Joe was the only person who explicitly expressed concerns about meeting people and making friends once he graduated. A mismatch, then, could be identified on his ITP in this area because this was considered independent and in no need for individualized instruction.

The transition domain of transportation, however, contained numerous incongruencies. Transportation ITP goals stated that 13 of the 15 students should be "encouraged to enroll in [a] driver's education course," but one of these students (Ron) already had his license. On Ron's ITP, the updated goal reflected that the goal was still "in progress." Why two students (Marshall and Ricky) had goals for using public transportation was unclear. Regardless, Ricky specifically mentioned his desire to drive. At least three students discussed driving without a license, and most said they were unaware of how to register for driver's education courses. None of the students commented that they expected not to drive by the time they graduated.

Some domains, such as medical needs, were never mentioned by any participants. Group health insurance was indicated on all ITPs in which the domain was addressed (14 of 15). Only Marshall and Ricky's ITPs listed a goal of providing information about public assistance, even though all of the students were currently receiving such help in FRLP. Registering for the selective service and voter registration were listed as goals on every ITP in each group.

Use of document reviews to verify participants' responses from interviewing, or triangulation of data sources, was limited. During interviews participants openly stated that they did not know or remember much about formal transition planning such as the ARD in which ITPs were generated. In fact, reports from interviews called into question the presence of most participants in this very meeting. If they did not know what a transition plan was, then had they actually ever been part of the meeting? A review of ITPs indicated all but one student had signed his own ITP, which was an indication that the participants had been to the meetings.

Aside from verifying the presence of participants in ITP meetings, this process also verified that participants indeed not know what was on their plans. When asked directly if they knew of any goals on their ITPs, participants said little. When they ventured guesses, they often listed career or postsecondary education goals but not goals from other domains such as income resources, recreation and leisure, or medical, which were frequently included on the ITP.

In fact, sometimes participants' self-defined goals directly clashed with the plan that was formalized in the special education folders. All participants across groups discussed the goal of pursuing postsecondary education. Even participants like Ron and Earl, who were not completely sure they would follow this plan, said they wanted to keep the option open. ITPs, however, revealed that most of these young men were not being prepared for college. In addition to the fact that many were involved in the vocational program, On the Job Training (OJT), many were exempt from the state exit tests. Table 4.6, organized by race/ethnic group, shows rates of exemption status from state exit tests.

Table 4.6
Group Exemption Status for Exit Tests

Participant group	Exit test exemption
African American	75%
European American	50%
Latino	80%

The task that had begun as the triangulation of data sources, to verify consistency of information, actually turned into triangulation of methods, or an effort to use different methods to collect different bits of information used to answer research questions. What the document reviews could reveal was that participants' goals and dreams, and their plans to reach them, were very often inconsistent with ITP components. These results, however, cannot be construed as misrepresentation, whether

intentional or not, on the part of participants. Rather, the results show that the context for participants to fulfill the roles and responsibilities of self-determination during postsecondary transition is not optimal.

Although the document review did include the notes, which I recorded verbatim, from the ITP meetings as recorded by the teacher, these did not provided much information. The potential of these notes to reveal discussions and actions regarding the decisions made by the ITP teams was not realized because they were not consistently contained as a part of the special education folder. Only six of the 15 reviews included notes from ITP meetings. Even when included, notes were brief and generally uninformative. The following samples of notes from ARD meetings were typical; often they restated the ITP content and provided obvious details.

> Written information given on transition.
> [Marshall's ITP Review, collected 10/11/02]
>
> Jaime will take 5 classes so he can work & play soccer.
> [Jaime's ITP Review, collected 10/07/02 & 10/11/02]
>
> Forest's ITP was reviewed at ARD meeting.
> [Forest's ITP Review, collected 9/20/02]

Observations

For reasons discussed at length in the previous chapter, I observed a subset of ITP meetings. Identifying information about the participant meetings I included in this analysis is included in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7
Subset of Participants for ITP Meeting Observations

Name	Race/Ethnicity	Age	Campus
Ron	African American	18	SHS
Forest	European American	17	SHS
Joe	European American	17	SHS
Ricky	Latino	17	CHS

Individual ITP Meetings

Analysis of observations of these meetings has consisted of review of the participation styles of each student, as well as ITP meeting procedures. First, I present a description of each ITP meeting I observed in an effort to capture the unique contextual information of each meeting.

Individual ITP Meetings

Ron's ITP meeting. Ron's ITP meeting was the only case in which the observation followed the focus group and individual interviews. His meeting was held in early February of 2003; therefore, I was unable to observe him before the interview process. Ron, his mother, the special education teacher, an assistant principal, and later, the VAC, all attended Ron's ITP meeting. The assistant principal began the meeting by saying that she had noticed an increase in Ron's level of maturity. A major point of discussion was whether Ron would complete enough credits to graduate, as he had only completed enough credits to be considered a first-semester junior. The VAC and

special education teacher presented a plan that would allow Ron to graduate in June 2003, if he did not fail any courses. The VAC was in control of the paperwork (e.g., credit sheets from data processing) and was the key speaker during this discussion. Other members of the group contributed only short responses and questions.

Ron seemed to pay attention to the description of the plan, which included Saturday School makeup sessions for absences incurred during the fall semester of the school year. He agreed to go. This plan also included changing Ron's grade from a math course that he took two years in a row. The VAC said she would average the first semester of the first year with the second semester of the second year, which would result in a passing average (by one or two points) and therefore, course credit. Ron and his mother seemed to listen to the plan, nodding their heads and making eye contact with the teachers. They did not ask questions or indicate their thoughts about the plan. The VAC concluded this discussion by saying that additional absences would result in the dissolution of the plan. Ron said he understood. She reminded him of the commitment of Saturday School, and she ended by asking him if he had attended any makeup sessions. He said he had been to two or three, and the assistant principal said she would check the log and let the VAC know of his credit status.

The special education teacher read the content of the transition plan and the VAC interjected some of the options she said she had presented to Ron during class discussions in a vocational course. According to the VAC, several vocational or

technical school options, which were state-supported and free of charge, were available to Ron. She advocated that he enter a job corps program with residential living and courses of study relative to trades and vocations in construction, food service, and other industries. She described the benefits of the program including tuition, residential accommodations, and insurance/healthcare. She stated that she thought it would be great for Ron but she explained that the rules were strict, and that enrollees were required to wear a uniform and adhere to a curfew.

During this part of the discussion, Ron said nothing. He appeared to be listening. Nonverbal communication included eye contact, but he did not nod in agreement and his facial expressions did not reveal either enthusiasm or distaste for the idea presented by the VAC. His mother was more vocal, asking questions and stating that a friend of hers had recently participated in the program. She also did not indicate whether she wanted Ron to pursue this option.

Once this program was discussed the special education teacher reviewed the IEP and asked all of the members to sign the paperwork. The general consensus was that this was Ron's last ARD meeting, as he would be graduating that semester. Participants thanked one another and departed.

Forest's ITP meeting. Forest was also a student at SHS. The special education teacher, an assistant principal, a general education teacher, Forest, and his grandmother (his legal guardian) all attended his ITP meeting. While the meeting began with a review of the ITP, the discussion quickly moved to a current crisis situation regarding Forest's use of controlled substances and his academic difficulties. His grandmother introduced the topic of his drug use to the group. Forest was upset by this, as my observation notes describe.

> Forest's grandmother interjects with 'He's doing pot again.' She continues by saying that she is frustrated and sick and tired and cannot handle the stress of him breaking the law. She states that she had high expectations and now she does know what to think about his future. Forest back talks his grandmother a bit and says, 'You don't know what you're talking about.' The hostility between the two is palpable. His grandmother cries.
> [Observation Notes, 9/10/02, 42-47]

This discussion was intertwined with transition topics. In general, the adults in the meeting talked to Forest, admonishing his recent behavior and trying to connect his current choices and the potential impact they had on his future. This discussion was sometimes directed to Forest's grandmother, rather than to Forest. For example, his special education teacher turned to his grandmother and stated that Forest needs to gain control of his daily situation and "set some goals." She read through the transition domains on the ITP and stated the choices that Forest had already indicated in a previous discussion. She mentioned that he was planning to live on his own after graduation.

> Forest interjects, 'As soon as possible!' More harsh comments are exchanged between Forest and his grandmother. The special education teacher says, 'Now listen Forest, you don't even have a job. How do you think you are going to support yourself?' Both his grandmother and his teacher state that all Forest wants to do is smoke pot and skate. He agrees.
> [Observation Notes, 9/10/02, 50-54]

As the discussion continued, Forest sat, slumped in a chair, not making eye contact with adults. He did, however, answer questions and interject his opinions, sometimes indirectly stating his needs and asking for help.

> Forest: I am stuck I do not know if I want to get my GED or my diploma. I know what I want to do but I am not taking any steps…. I am just getting my life back [post-probation] and I have all these choices and I don't know what to do….
> Teacher: Well, the thing is being on probation is not real life. We can put you on all these contracts for attendance and so on but you have to make the choices….
> Forest: I am making bad decisions but I don't know why.
> [Observation Notes, 9/10/02, 50-54]

The discussion, which was led primarily by the special education teacher, continued without resolution to the current problem, other than the adults in the meeting agreeing that Forest needed to stop using drugs and apply his energy toward making academic progress. His grandmother continued to cry and occasionally, the two argued openly. For the most part the other members of the committee seemed embarrassed or uncomfortable, never quite addressing the problems that were explicitly stated by the family, often avoiding eye contact and remaining quiet. The special education teacher did try to control the direction of the conference, sometimes scolding Forest, and by association, his grandmother.

> Teacher: Listen, you won't talk that disrespect in here. I don't know what you do at home but…not here. (Grandmother is mumbling about drugs and backtalk; Teacher ignores, talks over).
> [Observation Notes, 9/10/02, 91-92]

Forest's annual ARD came to a close after the IEP was reviewed and all members signed the paperwork. In the end, his grandmother repeatedly thanked the members of the meeting and left, still crying.

Joe's ITP meeting. Joe's review of his ITP was brief. Joe's father, a special education teacher, a school psychologist, an assistant principal, a family advocate from the state mental health service organization, and briefly, a general education teacher, were present, but Joe was not at the meeting.

> The teacher … explained that Joe was not at school because he was on a very important field trip but that if it was okay with the dad, they would go on. The father hesitated and never directly answered the question. The teacher decided to move forward.
> [Observation Notes, 10/29/02, 28-32]

> Teacher: 'Well, the vocational teacher really wanted him to be on that field trip. It's to the Goodwill and since it is transition coursework that coincides with….we thought it was real important that he went on the field trip.'Joe's father looks very confused, never verbally okays continuing meeting.
> [Observation Notes, 10/29/02, 39- 41, 47]

The team spent most of the meeting discussing current failing grades and the father's request, for a full reevaluation. The school was prepared to forego the third-year reevaluation and re-certify Joe's label as LD. The father explained that recent psychiatric intervention had been necessary, and that he wanted to see if other disabilities were present. The advocate supported Joe's father's argument and said that

the state psychiatrist had recommended a full reevaluation. The school psychologist said that Joe was up for reevaluation and she would do that by the date of compliance (which was four months hence) but she stressed that she would likely not find anything different and that perhaps the psychiatrist could do it and focus more on the affective issues Joe was currently experiencing. This discussion lasted about 45 minutes.

> Joe's father keeps trying to move the conversation back to testing so he can provide documentation to the psychiatrist about the reading level and receive tutoring services for his son. School personnel are skeptical that any additional evaluation needs to be complete in order for service delivery to be arranged. Joe's father believes the last eval was done in 1997. The family advocate and the father are very confused about evaluation processes and how they can actually use a reeval to secure services. This goes back and forth between them and the school psychologist. Finally, it is decided that the school psychologist, at the direct request of the father, will write a letter for the psychiatrist saying that the reeval will be completed by 2/03, which is in compliance with the 3 yr reeval date.
> [Observation Notes, 10/29/02, 117-123]

During the ITP review that followed, the teacher reads the items that are checked on the ITP. As she reads "Competitive employment without support," Joe's father is concerned. The advocate interjected that the family is really concerned that Joe gets a job.

> Teacher: I think that is unrealistic at this point with school and sports.
> Joe's father: I'm concerned that Joe does not have the social skills to get in the door. He will work hard and follow rules but…
> The family advocate explains that the mentor provided through his program could help with that. The teacher asks Joe's father where he sees him living at this point and he clearly misunderstands, thinking that she means where is Joe living right now, rather than where he thinks he will live after high school. Joe's father answers that he needs support, so that is put on ITP. The teacher then reads list of all

> other areas of transition, pre-checked by her. The parent agrees with everything. Future education is marked community college or university. Discussions returns to employment and the possibility of getting a job coach. The teacher explains that that will happen during his 'year of exit.' All items are to be completed by 2004. The ITP portion is over, papers are signed.
> [Observation Notes, 10/29/02, 144-155]

Although college/university options were checked for postsecondary educational opportunities, the teacher and Joe's father ended the meeting by discussing the OJT program and the possibility of getting Joe involved in this program. Also, the student's exemption status from exit tests was reviewed with the review of other ARD paperwork.

Ricky's ITP Meeting. Ricky's most recent ARD meeting, which was the meeting I observed, was actually a removal meeting. As such, the main purpose of the meeting was to conduct a manifestation determination and make a decision regarding Ricky's placement following a serious infraction of a school rule. In a conversation with the special education teacher several days before the meeting, he told me that the ITP would be reviewed. During the meeting, however, the ITP, which had not been reviewed/updated since April 2001, was not discussed. In fact, the entire meeting dealt with behavioral issues and Ricky's removal to an alternative campus.

Ricky, his father, two assistant principals, a special education teacher, a general education teacher, and a school psychologist were present at the meeting. School personnel followed a script, to which only they had access, to conduct the discussion of the manifestation of Ricky's disability and its impact on his decision to break a school

rule (communicating a "terrorist threat"). At times, the script required school personnel to ask for the input of the team. For example, the assistant principal in charge asked the members if they thought Ricky's actions were related to his disability. Although the question was presented to the group, discussion did not occur. Rather, the school psychologist read from the most recent evaluation and stated that Ricky was LD, which he said did not have any connection to his behavior. The special education teacher was asked to read the student's behavioral intervention plan, which he did. The plan documented a behavioral problem of making inappropriate comments in class, but stated that regular school rules should continue to apply to him.

The phrase "terrorist threat" was stated at various times throughout the meeting and repeated more than six times. During the meeting, the tape recorder used by the school was turned off and on intermittently. The decision was made to send Ricky to the Alternative Learning Center (ALC) where he would complete a suspension and then, if he did so successfully, return to CHS.

Transition topics were a part of the discussion. Ricky's father was concerned about whether his son would drop out of the program altogether or continue his high school education. He also asked questions about credits for courses and whether the work at ALC counted toward graduation. Neither the school nor the family explicitly addressed the ITP.

Ricky said very little throughout the meeting. He did respond to questions and he also asked questions. Occasionally he smiled, seemingly nervously or sarcastically. Other nonverbal communication included shaking his head and looking down at the table. Nevertheless, Ricky did make several attempts to advocate for himself and defend his decisions. For example, before the meeting officially began, Ricky brought up the difficulty he had been having locating an organization in which he could complete community service to make up for his poor attendance record. The following examples illustrate how both Ricky and his father attempted to make their needs known to the school, but with limited results.

> Assistant Principal: Here is form you can use for the community service.
> Ricky's father: Where was that form when he needed it?
> Assistant Principal: It is just an optional form.
> Ricky's father: Well, we didn't have nothin' to go by. He can't just walk in somewhere and get community service.
> Ricky: I did not know where to go. I went to Communities in Schools here and they didn't have nothin'.
> Assistant Principal: Well, not here. You have to do it after hours. I am sure they told you like at a church…
> Ricky's father: Why didn't you help him when he needed it for community service?
> Assistant Principal: That is something he needs to do on his own.
> [Observation Notes, 10/17/02, 37-53]

In another exchange, the assistant principal asked Ricky if he had enrolled in ALC during the emergency removal period between the time of the infraction and the time of this meeting. Ricky said that he had been waiting to hear the decision of the ARD meeting. His father supported his reason for delay; however, this was apparently different than the expectation of the school.

As the group tried to figure out what "packets" of self-directed work Ricky could complete in ALC for elective credit, Ricky again expressed himself by saying that he did not like art. Upon hearing this, both the special education teacher and the assistant principal had the following reaction.

> Assistant Principal: Now he needs some electives for packets.
> Ricky: What is available?
> Assistant Principal: Art, Drama, but I doubt you can do that by yourself or choir, sing to yourself…Do you like art?
> Ricky: No.
> Special education teacher and Assistant Principal looked at each other and together said: I thought you were going to say that.
> Special education teacher: Yeah, he was taken out of art once.
> Assistant Principal: he's TAAS exempt, right? How about PE on computer? Some people get that done in 5 days.
> [Observation Notes, 10/17/02, 218-232]

Input from Ricky was invited by school personnel when they asked if he understood the procedure, to which he always replied "yes." They did not ask him to discuss his behavior that warranted the meeting or the subsequent punishment. Nor did any member of the meeting ask Ricky or his father whether they wanted counseling or thought it appropriate. At the end of the meeting Ricky asked school personnel to clarify the word "sweatshirt" which he read in reference to the dress code at the alternative campus. He asked additional questions about when he would finish the program and be allowed to return to CHS. Once the removal was issued and the rules and regulations of ALC were handed to Ricky, the meeting adjourned. The assistant principal asked Ricky's father to accompany her to the office for paperwork.

Observations Across Meetings

While finding patterns was complicated by the small number of observations and the individual characteristics of each meeting, I was able to note commonalities in student participation and ITP procedures across observations, which are presented after a description of the observations.

Student participation in ITPs/ARDs. During these four observations, participants exercised varying degrees of self-determination. Often, the actions of adults, in particular school personnel, impacted the extent to which they demonstrated self-determining behavior. In Joe's case, there was no opportunity to provide input because the adults held the meeting in his absence.

While Ron, Forest, and Ricky were all present at the ARD meetings, each of the young men said very little; when they did speak, they often used yes/no responses to questions put forth by the adults in the group. Their nonverbal behaviors indicated that they did listen to others during the meeting. Many of the component skills of self-determination were not observed during these meetings. For example, students did not make many decisions about their education, nor did they self-assess progress and realign goals. Students did make some choices during these meetings. Ricky said he did not want to take art and Forest said he did not want to be disciplined with a behavioral contract.

ITP/ARD meeting procedures. According to special education teachers, the ITP is technically supposed to have its own meeting. For convenience, the ITP meeting is usually done in conjunction with the IEP, and together they make up the annual review of the student's special education program. At each of the three meetings where I observed the ITP process, this component was being reviewed, not generated.

Basically, the ITP review process I observed consisted of the special education teachers reading the form aloud and explaining aspects of the content. At each of the three ITP reviews, teachers started by explaining the meaning of the term ITP and the purpose of the procedure. In Ron's meeting, the VAC joined the special education teacher and explained technical school programs that would be available to him after graduation. In Forest's meeting, the special education teacher explained that if Forest wanted the goal of independently living, this would required him to support himself.

Teachers also questioned students and tried to get their input during certain points in the discussion. In each meeting, teachers asked students some version of the question, "What do you want to do after high school?" Discussions on this topic, in the cases of both Ron and Forest began with "I don't know." In Forest's case the teacher said, "He says he wants to be a Latin teacher." A career goal was never established at Ron's meeting.

Much of the content of the ITPs, however, was not reviewed. Sections on transportation contained the same goals on almost every ITP I reviewed. The key

transportation objective (on 13 of 15 plans) was, "Encourage enrollment in Driver's Education." Yet, teachers and families did not talk concretely about how to do this, or why, if the student was 16, it had not yet been done. In Forest's meeting, this discussion was initiated, but no decisions or evaluation of progress were completed.

> Teacher continues with ITP. She says she's encouraged driver's ed, but Forest doesn't want to do anything but skate. Grandmother concurs and says 'and smoke pot.' Forest says, 'You can stereotype me…' Discussion about a car from Grandmother goes on.
> [Observation Notes, 9/10/02, 69-71]

In another example, two objectives in the section entitled "Other Considerations" were included on all ITPs. These goals were, "Voter registration" and "Selective service." Ron was 18, so his teacher asked if he was registered for selective service and voting. The question "Has he registered yet?" was directed to his mother although Ron was present. Forest was turning 17 a week after the meeting and no discussion was spent on these goal statements. Similarly, the topic was not discussed with Joe's father.

Students' exemption status for state minimum competency tests was not discussed at any length in the meetings I observed. Forest had already passed the tests, putting him in line with the ultimate goal of attending a four-year university. Ricky, Ron, and, Joe were all exempt from testing. While this fact was mentioned at each meeting, absent from discussion were the implications of this decision. This discussion from Ricky's ARD meeting was typical.

> Assistant Principal: He's TAAS exempt, right? How about PE on computer? Some people get that done in 5 days.
> Teacher: Yes, he is exempt from the TAAS. You have to take PE at ALC.
> [Observation Notes, 10/17/02, 231-234]

For Ron, who was tentatively scheduled to graduate that semester, the main implication was that he would not be able to pursue a degree-granting program at the local community college (one of the goals he said he entertained) without first completing remedial courses in reading and math. And although Joe was absent from his meeting, his ITP contained a goal to attend college and become a doctor, as well as an exemption from testing. While his father and teachers might have deemed the goal of medical school unrealistic (given the fact they were discussing job coaches), I observed no explicit discussion of the implications of exemption. And although Joe's father indicated that he understood some of the obstacles in his son's path to educational attainment, he stated that he thought they were emotional, rather than cognitive in nature. Whether his understanding of his son's future options matched the school's expectations was not clear.

The reviews of the ITPs I observed were conducted rather quickly, representing far less than half of the total time spent in the ARD meetings. For Ron, whose transition goals were discussed more thoroughly than at the other meetings, the majority of the meeting was spent on reviewing and explaining the graduation plan. At meetings for Joe and Forest, crisis situations (mental health issues and substance abuse, respectively) dominated the discussion.

In addition to form protocols and time constraints, other procedural issues were common across meetings. General education teachers and guidance counselors were underrepresented at these meetings. At each meeting these school personnel were present only for a short while, or absent all together. At least one general educator is required to sign the special education paperwork, including the ITP, but none of these school personnel engaged in in-depth conversations about students' plans for the futures.

In terms of family involvement during ARD meeting procedures, parents/guardians were present at each of the four meetings. Their presence demonstrated the importance they placed on this meeting and sometimes they went to great lengths to participate. Ricky's father took off work and walked to the school, as the family does not have a car. Forest's grandmother came to the meeting days after neck/back surgery. Both Ron's mother and Joe's father left work for the meetings. Extended family members were not present at the meetings I observed.

The role of parents/guardians is beyond the scope of this research project, however, certain observations of their participation are worthy of mention. Across meetings, I observed numerous instances of the efforts of parents/guardians to control or contribute to the educational decision-making of their children's high school and postsecondary plans. Joe's father requested a full reevaluation of his son's disability as soon as possible. He was told that he could have an educational review within four

months. Ricky's father asked the school to keep his son on campus and pay attention to what he saw as his individual needs. He was told that the school had to follow disciplinary procedures and remove him to an alternative setting. When he became frustrated the assistant principal told him to "act civil." Forest's grandmother asked for drug counseling and additional help with behavioral control. No one responded to her request. Time and again, I observed that fulfilling or denying direct requests from family members was independently determined by school personnel.

Because this research project is concerned with the impact of race/ethnicity on self-determination behaviors and perceptions, I was also interested in the race/ethnicity of the school administrators and the interaction at meetings. Table 4.8 details the composition of members of the ARD teams, based on the race/ethnicity of participants.

In some of the meetings, all members were of the same race/ethnicity. For example, in Forest's meeting, participants, including myself as the observer, were European American. Yet, in three of the four ARD meetings, communication between members of different racial/ethnic groups occurred. In Ricky's meeting the family, one assistant principal, and the school psychologist were all Latinos. Other participants were African American and European American. In Ron's meeting, all school representatives were European American and the family was African American.

Table 4.8
Racial/Ethnic Composition of ARD Teams

Participant	Campus	ARD member	Race/Ethnicity
Ron	SHS	Student	African American
		Mother	African American
		Special education teacher	European American
		VAC	European American
		Assistant principal	European American
Forest	SHS	Student	European American
		Grandmother	European American
		Special education teacher	European American
		VAC	European American
		Assistant principal	European American
		General education teacher	European American
Joe	SHS	Father	European American
		Special education teacher	European American
		School Psychologist	European American
		Assistant principal	European American
		General education teacher	European American
		Family advocate	Latino
Ricky	CHS	Student	Latino
		Father	Latino
		Special education teacher	African American
		School Psychologist	European American
		Assistant principal	European American
		Assistant principal	Latina
		General education teacher	European American

An observation supported by the data is that in each meeting, power differentials could be noted. In each case, school personnel had control of the meeting. The school controlled the copies of paperwork and use of materials (e.g., tape recorder), the time frame of the meeting, and the choices of courses and educational

plans under consideration. The family and school shared control of some elements of the meeting. Parents did contribute to topics for discussion, however, at times school personnel refused to engage these topics. The reverse was also observed. For example, Joe's father did not answer questions about the nature of his son's recent psychiatric treatment, although he did explain that his decision was made in effort to protect his son.

The member of these committees who exhibited the least amount of power was the student. Examples abounded. Ron was never asked about his preference of postsecondary options and the only program discussed in detail may not have met his interests. It did not match his opinions and ideas expressed in interviews. Forest did not want to discuss his grandmother's concerns about his poor hygiene. Yet the topic was addressed and attributed to his drug use. Joe was sent on a field trip; whether this was his personal choice remains unknown. His teacher said, "We decided" he should go because the "teacher said it was real important." Ricky denied the charge of terrorist threat during interviews, explaining that he was not serious about the comment he made that resulted in suspension. He did not, however, say this during the ARD meeting.

As the results of data collection suggest, differences among participants' contributions to ITP meetings, based on race/ethnicity, did exist; yet they were subtle. More common were instances in which participants across groups responded in similar ways. Teasing out the implications of this is presented after a more holistic view of the

entire research project is completed. Themes that emerged, once consideration of all the data were taken together, will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

A variety of data was gathered for this research project. Each set of data told a story or provided a glimpse of a complex phenomenon in the lives of a group of high school students with learning disabilities. While special education protocol does require planning activities in preparation for the transition students make from adolescence to adulthood, previous empirical studies have shown that the extent to which students are exposed to and participate in these activities has varied. Although much has been written on the topic of how best to prepare students and their families for this transitional period, little has been written about how students and families conceptualize and actualize this process. The purpose of this study, then, was to provide a representation of the perspectives and experiences of student-participants involved in transition planning. In order to increase the detail with which this representation took shape, I contextualized participants' comments with evidence from observations and documentation of their experiences. Whereas the previous chapter examined each set of data to the greatest extent possible, this chapter provides a holistic view of all three sets for a more complete view of transition planning for these participants.

Four themes comprise this chapter and represent participants' perspectives and experiences relative to formal transition planning. Embedded within each theme, is a

comparative analysis of the impact of race/ethnicity and class on participants' perspectives and experiences relative to transition planning.

I Know What I Want to Do, But I Don't Know How to Make It Happen

Special education literature relative to career planning for students with LD has demonstrated that these students either do not set goals or that they base their goals on insufficient knowledge of their own strengths and weaknesses (Rojewski, 1996). Yet, neither of these findings describe with sufficient accuracy the perceptions or experiences of participants in this study. These students had thought about what they wanted to do in the future. Of the 15 participants, only Ron repeatedly discussed uncertainty about his future plans. The goals students selected reflected some degree of self-knowledge.

At times, however, participants seemed to focus on socially acceptable responses to questions about their goals for the future, selecting high profile, high-paying careers, or matriculation in college. Joe's desire to become a doctor, for example, did not seem to be based on perceptions of his own talent or affinity he had for the sciences. Michael openly talked about his desire to become a doctor to acquire wealth. Discussions about attending college were pervasive even when students simultaneously discussed a dislike for academic endeavors and/or their scholastic failure. Perhaps *not* planning to attend college was socially unacceptable to these participants.

Participants' plans to enroll in postsecondary educational institutions contradicted expectations based on statistical data that show that they faced several obstacles to college enrollment as students with LD and students with low socioeconomic status. Of course, planning to enroll and actually enrolling are distinct. Yet, their decidedly pro-college orientation was interesting given that students with LD enroll in college at much lower rates than their peers without LD or their peers with other selected disabilities (e.g., deafness, blindness, physical impairments) (NCES, 1994). Also, given their economic status (i.e., their eligibility for free or reduced lunch programs) their plans to enroll in college might be less likely to come to fruition because of economic issues and a necessity for financial aid (Harris & Halpin, 2002; NCES, 1998). One possible source of influence on their desire to go to college, in addition to parent expectations and social expectations, could have been from older siblings already enrolled in college. Three of the four African Americans had older siblings who had gone to college, as did two of the five Latino participants. Sam was the only European American who had such a role model.

Often participants' career goals did seem unrealistic but this seemed to stem from factors other than a lack of knowledge of self. They demonstrated awareness of their own strengths and needs, whether or not they referred to themselves as people with disabilities, which informed their goals. In fact, most of these young men picked career goals based on a special talent they or others recognized in them. The extent to

which talents and interests had been developed varied across groups. African Americans and Latinos reported more exposure to school clubs and after school employment. DeShawn and Martin focused career goals in the field of art because they had each won competitions with their artwork. Jesus talked about being an auto mechanic after he experienced success helping his father at his shop. Thomas wanted to be a professional basketball player and his involvement on the school team and in city leagues made him confident that he could attain this goal. Jaime also based his desire to become a professional soccer player on his experience in organized sports clubs.

European American students, however, reported few work experiences or extracurricular activities that informed their career aspirations. Instead they spoke about pursuing careers that involved tasks they enjoyed. For Sam this was cooking, for Forest it was skateboarding, and for Trent it was physical challenge. Earl and Marshall also related their choice of careers in the field of construction to the pleasure they got from playing with Legos.

Regardless of the idea or motivation behind participants' career goals, or the extent to which related talents had been honed, evidence of planning for goal attainment was sparse. For a variety of reasons, sequences of actions toward goal attainment were not clearly defined or attempted. Plans were typically undefined or based on incomplete information or lack of understandings of requisite skills. Students discussed their goals of enrolling in college, yet across groups they did not know how

to apply, were unfamiliar with admission criteria or with course workload and academic rigor. Sometimes there was a glimpse of reality in these plans, as when students questioned whether they would be able to succeed in college if they were currently struggling in high school.

Planning for needs that are result of disability is a key issue to successful postsecondary transition. Yet, participants in this study, similar to those in Rojewski's study (1996), talked less frequently about the influence of their weaknesses or disabilities upon their postsecondary goals. Across groups they did not mention how they would compensate or seek assistance for disability-related services once they left high school. Many did not call the challenges they faced "disabilities," possibly downplaying the effect disability had on their lives.

Every participant in this study made choices, but the likelihood of those choices coming to fruition was diminished because they did not know how to take action toward their goals or remained unaware of potential obstacles. Only one third of participants were eligible for the state high school competency examinations, yet all 15 wanted to go to college. To pursue a college degree, these students would have to first take remedial courses and then pass similar tests before enrollment. They were not aware of this. Furthermore, developing ITP objectives in the domain of postsecondary education consistent with students' self-determination to go to college was not evidenced. Goals/objectives that addressed test preparation or information gathering on

alternative postsecondary education programs, remedial course work, or tutoring, were not documented.

These planning issues were conspicuously missing from ARD discussions and ITP documents. In observations, teachers generally stated the status of exemption, but no discussion proceeded. At Ricky's meeting, for example, the only mention of exit tests occurred when one teacher confirmed to another that Ricky was indeed exempt.

In Forest's meeting, the conversation was more detailed but ironically, although he had already passed the exit tests he was placed in a special education English class. Forest complained bitterly about this during the individual interview:

> Forest: First of all, in English I really don't like that teacher. We always read these stupid little kid stories and have to do tests over them and I think it's just pointless. Like English has been repeating itself pretty much since the 6th grade. It's just the same thing over and over again and it's getting pretty boring. I don't like reading too much about stuff that I'm really not interested in.
> [Forest, Individual Interview, 48]

> Audrey: Do you have any classes that you work on writing specifically in?
> Forest: Not really.
> Audrey: What about English? Do you guys do anything in there for that?
> Forest: Not really. We hardly ever write essays or anything. I think we've only done two the whole year and those were for, I guess, that new [state] test thing or or something like that.
> [Forest, Individual Interview, 134-140]

Across groups, participants have experienced conditions of poverty as evidenced by their participation in the free and reduced cost lunch program. Perhaps their desire to go to college was related to a desire to change their socioeconomic

status, and they saw college as a way out of poverty. Certainly this could explain the comments of African American students about their parents' prevalent expectations for them to attend college, a preference that has been documented in earlier research (Hill, 1999). Similarly, previous studies have shown that Latino parents expect their children to attend college and pursue greater economic opportunities than they had (Hayes, 1992). The same could be true for European American participants whose parents wanted them to have more than what they themselves were able to provide, and college was seen as a tool to achieve this. Also across groups, parent had expectations of their sons to pursue careers in the military, which has long been considered a way for people who lack sufficient means to access steady employment and postsecondary training and education.

What Does the ARD Have to Do with My Future?

Across groups, participants in this study were largely uninvolved in their transition planning process. They were not aware of the potential importance of an ITP, or of the services and programmatic resources to which they should have access in preparation for postsecondary transition. Although each young man was present during ARD meetings where ITPs were developed and each signed his own ITP, they could remember little about the purpose of transition planning or the content of their individualized plan. While many variables likely contributed to this lack of awareness, notes from observations, participants' comments, and document review data taken

together suggest that the disparity between what is required by both legislation and preferred practices and the reality of transition planning in the contexts of this study is a result, in part, of the demands of the process itself.

Many components of the process, as experienced by participants in this study, were not designed to promote student awareness or involvement. Furthermore, adults were hindered from providing guidance by the process. In particular, ITP procedures, the content of discussion, and follow up activities, were outside of the control of the participants and their families, and in many ways prevented them from acting with agency. For example, Joe's ITP team determined that he might need a job coach. While the VAC explained that this would be available to Joe during his senior year, his father did not receive any specific information about the service. If he had been given information such as the contact number of the service provider, he could establish a link between his family and the job coach and gain a better understanding of the services his son would receive.

School personnel were in control of IEP/ITP meeting procedures. School personnel were responsible for calling the meeting, presenting the meeting agenda, as well as allocating a time allotment for each item on that agenda. Although parents/guardians do have the right to ask for an IEP/ITP team meeting, the meetings I observed were annual meetings, or (in Ricky's case) an emergency disciplinary meeting, in which the school had requested the presence of the family and student. Two

participants did mention times when they or their parents requested a meeting with teachers or other school personnel. When Earl wanted OJT, he arranged for a telephone conference with his mother and teacher and Ricky described times when his father would set up meetings to discuss scheduling problems.

Team membership was largely decided by school personnel as well. Often, the resulting team was not multidisciplinary and general education teachers and counselors were absent. During his ITP conference, Forest stated that he would "probably [need] a college degree" to pursue a career as a Latin instructor, revealing his lack of awareness about the requisites of this goal. A guidance counselor could have better informed him of the postsecondary education requirements of careers that interested him, but none was present at this meeting. Also, at that same meeting his Latin teacher sent a note that he had been "acting goofy" during class. Had the teacher been at the meeting, she would have been apprised of Forest's interest in the subject, which may have helped her provide a connection between the subject and a career. When Joe's father asked why Joe was failing art, no one could answer the question. Eventually, the art teacher was pulled from class and joined the meeting. She stated that she "gave" Joe a 69 for the first semester because he had not been in class to do the work. He could make up the assignments, but he needed to be responsible for this arrangement.

Generally, meetings started with a review of either the IEP or the ITP. This was done very quickly. Usually explanatory statements included phrases such as "what he

wants to do with his life" or words such as "career" and "goals." Generally, jargon was avoided at the meetings I observed. An exception to this was the school psychologist's mention of alternative labels for Joe, including ED, or Emotionally Disturbed. Also, during Ricky's meeting, jargon was abundant. "Manifestation determination," "alternative setting," "infraction," and "terroristic threat" were used over and over again without being accompanied by definitions or explanations.

Discussion followed the review of special education forms. For example, if the meeting started with the ITP, the teacher would first address exit goals and then ITP objectives in the transition domains listed on the form. Reviews of goals rather than goal generation occurred with high frequency. Ostensibly, this is because the participants in this study were already 16 years old and had ITPs in place. The form provided a space to document subsequent years' progress related to original goals and objectives, perhaps encouraging ARD teams not to generate new plans. Updating existing ITPs rather than generating new ones might be problematic if the original ITP, generated at age 15 or 16, is no longer appropriate for the student when he is 17 or 18 years old. While writing new goals and objectives on the same ITP is possible under the current procedures, this was not done even when the ARD team discussed changes. For example, Joe's ITP originally stated exit goals (dated 4/10/01) of employment and independent living with no support. During the meeting I observed (10/29/02), the team (in Joe's absence) decided he needed support in both areas and discussed linking Joe to

a job coach. Nevertheless, goals and objectives in these two areas were neither rewritten nor augmented. Neither document reviews nor meeting observations provided evidence that ITP goals and objectives were generated or reconsidered; they were only updated. This may explain why, in many cases, exit goals did not match students' responses in interviews (see Tables 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6).

Talking to participants revealed that although participants shared common goals, each young man had unique aspirations for his future. However, if members of the ITP team have a master ITP plan in mind as they develop ITPs for students, self-determination efforts other than those that fit members' expectations are unlikely. For example, every participant across all three groups was considered "independent" in the area of recreation and leisure. There were other choices on the ITP forms, but these were not selected. They included: family supported recreation, specialized recreation for persons with disabilities, community parks and recreation programs, and local clubs and associations. Yet, interview data revealed that Joe was concerned with making friends after high school.

> There's usually people at school and then like when school's over, they're not going to be that many people, unless you go somewhere, then you have to meet her, then [inaudible]. All this other stuff [inaudible]. It can be very hard. You'd have to sit alone or sit at the bar.
> [Joe, Focus Group, 186]

Joe, as a self-determining person, may have decided that interpersonal relationships are a priority and deserve additional planning effort. If Joe and his ITP team discussed this

priority, they could brainstorm ways in which his individual needs could be the driving force behind postsecondary transition planning.

Furthermore, since the exit goals on the ITP often did not match participants' desires, they may have wondered how this plan addressed their concerns and ideas about their futures. In the domain of independent living, for example, several students across groups said that they wanted to live at home after high school. On the ITPs for those students the independent living goal was to obtain independent residences. There are a myriad of possible reasons for the mismatch (e.g., the student did not speak up at the ITP meeting; the parents' goal was given greater importance than the goal voiced by the student; the teacher did not ask the student's opinion; the student changed his mind since the development of the ITP; etc.). Nevertheless, self-determination during transition planning cannot be supported if participants' postsecondary goals are not represented on their ITPs.

During the meeting, the only person with access to the planning form was the teacher conducting the meeting. Therefore, families had to listen carefully and process a great deal of auditory information. For students with LD, for whom auditory perception may be an area of difficulty (Smith, Polloway, Patton, & Dowdy, 2001), this could be particularly problematic. When teachers identified objectives and goals, they generally did not list the entire array of possibilities; instead, they read the option that had been checked off at a previous meeting. In other words, the teacher might

acknowledge that the student was expected to live independently, without assistance after high school. The teacher did not, however, read items that offered independent living with support, living with family and relatives, or supervised living arrangements as options.

Once the purpose of the ITP was stated, the review ensued. I did not observe any discussion regarding the goal of the review, the impact of the ITP on students' school lives or special education services, or the adaptability and flexibility of the ITP over students' high school careers. Even the term ITP was used infrequently. Explicit discussion designed to make the transition planning efforts obvious to all participants seemed absent. Yet it is this explicitness that is necessary in order for students to become more actively involved in their own transition planning process (Bassett & Lehmann, 2002). And if parents/guardians are to offer guidance to their children as they go through the process, they need this too (Wehmeyer, Morningstar, & Husted, 1999).

If students and families do not know the potential benefits of having an ITP, they are not likely to realize services guaranteed in IDEA but not implemented. Participants said that they did not discuss transition planning with their teachers or other school personnel, either during ITP meetings or at other times. Although the team is supposed to be multidisciplinary, special education teachers were primarily responsible for the document. Participants did not express resentment or frustration as a

result of having limited contact with their ITP team members, nor did they identify this as a possible obstacle to goal attainment. In fact, as Ricky's comments suggest, participants did not think such planning was the responsibility of the teachers.

> Actually, I don't think they had a chance to be able to ask me. Usually, I'm the kind of person, I will sit in the back, I'll have my jacket on, my CD player, listening to it and trying to do my work. I'm not disturbing nobody, so I don't think they do know [my plans for the future]. But if they do come over with something like that, I'll do it. I'll tell them what I want to be.
> [Ricky, Focus Group, 84]

No student fully described what an ITP was or how it could be useful. About half of the participants (eight of 15) stated that they did not remember discussing the plan at all. Of the participants who did remember the ITP, five (one African American, three European Americans, and one Latino) associated ITP with a plan for college. The other three associated ITPs with a plan for "the future." No participant connected the plan, as they recalled it, to any action on the part of themselves, their teachers, or other school personnel. If follow up actions/services had occurred, students did not report these. Document reviews, however, revealed that the objectives required various members of the team to follow up on transition efforts. For example, many of the ITPs contained the objective, "Encourage student to enroll in driver's education." Yet 14 of 15 participants in the study did not have driver's licenses or knew little about how to enroll. Many reported driving without licenses. For the student who did have his license (Ron), this goal remained on his ITP. In general, participants seemed unaware of ITP protocol and its relevance.

Other topics commonly not discussed in meetings were issues identified in special education literature as significant to successful transition. For example, information regarding the distinction between entitlements for services during compulsory education (through IDEA) and eligibility for postsecondary services (through ADA and other legislation) is considered important because families may not realize this distinction or its implications (Cozzens, Dowdy, & Smith, 1999). When Joe's father brought up his concern that although his son was a hard worker, he thought he did not have sufficient social skills to "get through the front door" of a place of employment, the teacher responded by asking where Joe's father expected his son to live after graduation (this was the next item on the exit goal list). Later, the teacher did bring up the possibility of getting a job coach during the "year of exit" but she did not elaborate on procedures to arrange this. Also confusing was that Joe's ITP continued to state "college or university" as a postsecondary educational goal, which was potentially inappropriate, given the discussion about the extensive nature of Joe's academic and psychological difficulties.

Additionally, life skill domains, such as how to complete chores necessary for maintaining a household (e.g., cooking, cleaning) and how to establish interpersonal relationships, can impact how well people with disabilities adjust once out of high school (Patton, Cronin, & Wood, 1999). Yet these areas were not addressed in ITP meetings.

In Forest's ITP meeting, the teacher stated that she had interviewed him earlier that day to determine his preferences and future goals. In other meetings I observed no mention was made of the legal mandate or prefered practices rationale for student involvement. As the forms were being reviewed teachers discussed their content in a cursory way. Statements such as, "We marked independent residence because he is planning to live on his own" were common. Once reviews of the paperwork were completed, ITP forms were signed.

Almost exclusively, participants spoke only after having been spoken to during ITP meetings. In observations, teachers controlled turn-taking during dialogue, favoring input of the parent/guardian over the student. In fact often times discussion would exclude the student altogether, referring to him in the third person and neglecting his presence.

> Teacher: Forest wants to do something with Latin. (To grandmother) He needs to set goals and get all his credits. He failed some classes last year.
> Grandmother: He doesn't do anything. (She begins to cry.)
> Assistant Principal: All this can be easily cleared up if Forest would just do what he has to do.
> Forest: Yeah I know.
> Assistant Principal: He has a lot of unexcused absences.
> Grandmother: They are excused. (Goes into lengthy explanation for teachers.)
> [Observation Notes, 9/10/02, 61-67]

The example above is representative of those in which, rather than talking with students, committee members talked about them in their presence. This bothered students, as reflected in their comments. They discussed how teachers were more likely

to address their parents and how their participation seemed incidental to the process. At the same time, participants across groups also talked about the advantages of this and the displeasure they felt when they were thrust into the spotlight. Both African Americans and Latinos said that they often addressed concerns later when they were alone with their parents. Sam, like several European American students, said that he would rather defer to his mother than to other ITP team members. Nevertheless, participants described the majority of their interactions in ARDs as being driven by adult expectations and requirements.

One driving force behind the ITP process seemed to be time availability. When meetings occurred during regularly scheduled class times, teachers and administrators had many conflicting demands including teaching class, monitoring students, attending multiple parent conferences, and completing paperwork and other tasks. This was sometimes true even when the meetings occurred after school hours. Most of the meetings I observed lasted about one hour, with roughly 10 minutes allotted for the transition plan. While the main objective of school personnel was to review already existing ITPs with students and their families, time for substantive conversation about why certain goals were selected or why objectives were considered important was either not available or not given priority. For Ricky, the ITP was not reviewed at all, although the special education teacher had told me he intended to review it.

The families' objectives for the meetings quite often did not match committees' objectives, thus available time was used to resolve this conflict. Because teachers had a specific goal for the meeting, to get the ITP updated and annual reviews completed, the process was teacher-driven.

Patterns of participant awareness and involvement during ITP meetings did not seem to vary across groups. The same was true of the process itself. Meetings followed a fairly uniform protocol to the extent that the agenda did not vary according to the race/ethnicity of student-participant, nor did the review of IEP/ITPs. In fact, even the content of the ITPs was similar.

Important exceptions to this, however, should be noted. Postsecondary education exit goals from the ITPs did differ by group. European Americans were more likely to qualify for exit examinations and therefore were more closely aligned with the goal of college enrollment. Interestingly, African Americans, all of whom considered college, were exempt from the exams in three of four cases. For Latinos, all of whom stated that they wanted to go to college, the exemption rate was four of five. This difference may be indicative of teacher expectations that varied according to race/ethnicity, which has been repeatedly documented in educational research (Gottfredson, Marciniak, Birdseye, & Gottfredson, 1995); however, such a conclusion would require additional data collection and analysis. What can be concluded here, though, is that for African Americans and Latinos, inconsistencies between students'

goals and ITP statements were more common than for European American students. This type of discord, and the lack of discussion during the ITP process, may have resulted in a lack of involvement of students.

Another possible difference among groups is the extent to which student awareness and involvement in their ITP meetings was mediated by their parents/guardians. Although participants across groups reported attending ARD meetings with their parents/guardians, African Americans and European Americans reported more instances of interaction among their parents, their teachers, and themselves on transition related issues. For example, Ron, Martin, and Thomas all shared instances in which their parents drew them into ITP-related discussions during meetings. If teachers asked the parents of these young men which courses would be preferable, the parents then asked their sons. For European Americans, the exchange was a bit different, but still indicated mutual involvement. Sam and Earl both wanted their parents to act on their behalves when they needed to negotiate special educations services.

Latinos, however, generally did not discuss mutual involvement during ITP meetings. At least half of the parents of Latinos in this study had not experienced the U.S. educational system as students, and several spoke Spanish as their first or perhaps only language. Latinos had more to negotiate than just the ITP process. Ricky hinted at

this when he said that at times he needed to explain to his father what was happening in the ARD procedures.

> He does, he tells me just to participate in this ARD thing. And I do and I help him out. If they tell him one thing and he didn't get it, I'll help him out with the thing.
> [Ricky, Individual Interview, 84]

One effect of parents' inexperience could be that Latino participants were required to act with more self-determination than participants in other groups because the system did not make accommodations to include their parents. Most of the Latino participants' comments about school-related decision making reflected self-determination. Tony was an exception to this. More than the other Latino participants, he spoke of his own involvement in the ITP process as it was integrally related to that of his mother, and at times, his grandmother. If Latinos practiced more self-determination, they perhaps did so with guidance from parents who were unfamiliar with the system, again calling into question the efficacy of self-determination when participants lack the knowledge and experience to participate effectively.

Comparative analysis of groups revealed differences in both the content of the ITPs and student and parent/guardian involvement during ARDs, both of which could influence student awareness of the ITP and involvement in planning activities. Yet, participants' comments across groups showed that awareness and involvement in transition planning was low. The ITP process itself seemed to hinder student participation. While being aware of one's plan is not a sufficient condition for self-

determination, it is a logical prerequisite; one must be aware of the options before one can make an informed choice.

I Count on My Family, not My Teachers, to Help Me Plan for the Future

Given that participants were not actively involved in the ITP process, their reliance on their family members, rather than their teachers, for transition related decision-making and planning activities was not surprising. In this context, transition planning also differed from school-defined activities (e.g., developing an ITP, determining curriculum requirements) and could be more loosely described as conversations about future goals and immediate actions students should be taking to realize their dreams. Participants said that much of the content of the conversations between themselves and their family members had to do with solving problems and maintaining control of pressing academic situations. In other words, participants (across groups, but more commonly African Americans and Latinos) talked about being reminded by their parents to attend school or complete homework with explicit connections being made between these requirements and the goals they wanted to pursue. For example, when Thomas talked about needing to practice basketball and his desire to play collegiate sports, his mother would remind him that his academic subjects were also important. Many of the other participants also talked about the gentle reminders parents/guardians gave them to stay on task and complete prerequisite skills in high school before becoming too concerned about future plans.

Across groups, participants indicated they talked with their parents and other family members about their dreams and the adults offered advice or helped establish important connections. The topic of these discussions, as relayed by participants, seemed to focus on career choices. Rarely did students mention discussions about postsecondary living arrangements, transportation, daily living skills, or finances. Parents/family members helping students complete tax forms was an exception to this.

Postsecondary transition literature discusses the importance of teaching parents how to provide opportunities for self-determination (Field, 1996; Field & Hoffman, 1994). Yet participants in this study gave many examples of ways in which their parents both gave them opportunities to exercise self-determination, and provided guidance on how to act accordingly. Parents/guardians supported their goals, even when goals seemed unrealistic. For example, Forest wanted to have a skateboarding park and company. His uncle, with whom he felt very close, asked him to write a business plan and then gave him constructive criticism. His grandmother supported him as well.

> [My grandmother]'s not the smartest person, but she's really sweet and she backs me up on whatever it is I talk to her about. She thinks it sounds pretty good too. She said if she was a skateboarder she'd want to skate at my parks.
> [Forest, Individual Interview, 62]

Participants indicated that decisions their parents made for them were limited to forcing them to attend school when they would have self-determined to be truant. Additionally, when participants talked about situations in which their goals for the

future conflicted with the expectations of their parents and guardians, they said their parents gave them the final say. For example, Jaime said that his father wanted him to join the family business rather than pursue a career in soccer, but that his mother and he had discussed both options extensively and she told him to "follow his dreams." Still, he said he would consult with his brothers, parents, and uncles before making any decisions. Similarly, Ron said his mother accepted that he was unwilling to pursue a career in the military even though she herself was a veteran.

While participants said they had a lot of freedom to make decisions and set goals for the future, Jesus was perhaps the most openly conflicted about his career goals, as he thought about working for his father or pursuing another career independently. His parents did not discuss alternative careers with him, he said, because his employment at their auto mechanic shop was a given. He did not seem to feel negative about this and talked about the advantages of entering an established job in an area in which he had confidence and experience. If he did entertain other dreams, he did not discuss them with specificity.

While their collaboration with family members on transition planning varied by racial/ethnic group, participants across groups emphasized the importance of interpersonal relationships in determining the nature of the collaboration. For example, African Americans dedicated much of their conversations to the topic of the care and love they received from their parents and how that was important to them as they set

and pursued goals. All four African Americans, including DeShawn whose relationship with his mother was difficult, discussed the importance of their parents' support as they addressed postsecondary plans. They talked about material and other types of support their parents provided.

European Americans and Latinos talked about the influence of their parents to a much lesser extent. Many openly said they did not talk to their parents about their future goals. When they did address the topic, they too talked about caring and emotionally close relationships between themselves and their family members that contributed to transition planning. They said their parents believed that they could accomplish their goals.

Members of these later two groups also discussed the importance of extended family members more frequently than did African Americans. Four of the six European Americans and three of the five Latinos talked about how aunts and uncles had influenced their career choices. Much of the involvement of these extended family members was limited to discussion of the adults' experiences and their advice on how to pursue careers similar to their own. Occasionally, participants talked about receiving more concrete advice (e.g., tips for college application processes). Thomas was the only African American student who mentioned talking to his uncle about a career in the military.

Analysis of the impact of race/ethnicity on participants' perceptions of the roles of their parents and family members is, in some ways consistent with existing research which establishes a continuum of interdependence and independence in familial relationships. European American adolescents tended to follow a more independent script of interpersonal family relationships, while African Americans and Latinos tend to follow a more interdependent script (Greenfield, 1994).

While all participants emphasized the importance of their family on the transition planning process, the type of support, and the weight that support carried in the decision making process, varied across groups. African American and Latino participants asked their parents and other family members what those adults wanted them to do. For example, Jaime and his parents expected him to live on his own after graduation, but not immediately. He said that he would first check with his parents and brothers to see if they wanted him to stay at home and contribute to the business, or leave and pursue a career in soccer. The context of his comments revealed that he would defer to their opinions, and that if they asked him to stay he would, revealing his own leaning toward an interdependent relationship with his family. Jesus would also defer to his parents expectations that he work with his father. Ron repeatedly said that he asked his mother what she wanted him to do after graduation. In more subtle ways, Tony discussed his intentions to meet the expectations laid before him by his mother and grandmother.

On the other end of the continuum, European American participants talked more about stating their own opinions and goals, irrespective of those of their parents/guardians. Trent said that although his parents expected him to go to college, he planned to enter the military. Forest said that he talked to his uncle and grandmother to find out what they thought about his plan, not so that he could gain their approval, but so that he could gain their advice on how he could best pursue what it was that he wanted to do. This suggests a more independent orientation.

But, inasmuch as continuums represent opposite orientations, so too do they represent all points between. Ron and Thomas both talked about deciding that they did not want careers in the military despite their parents' veteran status, but they also talked about discussing this extensively with parents and making sure their parents "were okay with" their decisions. And while DeShawn was living independently from his father, he still relied very heavily on his guidance and emotional support.

While participants' orientations toward interdependence or independence did seem to vary with group membership when the topic was the establishment of career goals, discussion about independent residency was a different case altogether. Here, participants across groups mentioned their desire to live by themselves *eventually* but not *immediately* following high school. Perhaps this phenomenon had more to do with participants' economic situations than with other variables because each talked about "getting on their feet" or "saving money." And some members of each group also

talked about the emotional support of family that they were not yet ready to leave behind upon graduation, making them reluctant to live by themselves. Only Forest talked about living with a peer after graduation.

Earl was the only participant who said that he would follow his parents' edict and "move out" upon turning 18, which is a fairly traditional European American view and one that is represented in many discussions of self-determination in special education. In fact, residential independence is a criterion of self-determination on some assessment tools in this area (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997), demonstrating a close relationship between the concept of self-determination as it is explored in the literature and underlying European American, and perhaps middle-class, values.

Certainly, participants' experiences as people with low socioeconomic status may have contributed to their sense of interdependence with family members, which has been documented in previous research (Hill, 1999). Many of the participants talked about financially supporting other members of their family once they graduated and established careers. In fact, Earl was already contributing to his family's income. About half of the participants from each group talked about their desire to help their siblings and parents maintain a better lifestyle by contributing financial support as they got older.

One curious finding was the difference with which African American participants spoke about the significance of their relationships with their parents,

emphasizing that the care and love they received fueled their ability to reach their goals. These experiences are consistent with existing research that has demonstrated the close bonds between African American mothers and their children and child-centered rearing practices of African American parents (Hill, 1999). Both Thomas and DeShawn emphasized the influence of their fathers. This is important because some research in the area of African American familial relationships has reported diminished relationships between fathers and their children (Hill, 1999). Even Martin, who talked more about his close bond with his mother, said that his relationships with both his father and his stepfather were important.

Interestingly, when participants across groups brought up teachers who contributed to their transition planning, they again emphasized the importance of the relationships they had with teachers, describing them as "good people" or "caring" or feeling liked by the teachers. In fact, often the teachers who participants identified as being the most influential were teachers with whom they no longer had classes, but still considered "friends." Still, participants' rarely gave any examples of how teachers advanced goal attainment. They did talk about parents/guardians and other family members helping them find jobs, providing them with literature on college programs, and arranging college visits, but these topics rarely came up in reference to teachers. DeShawn and Martin's art teacher was one exception. She had provided them the connections to art contests, college visits, and college recruiters. The nonparticipation

of this particular teacher in the ARD conferences of these two young men was conspicuous, because her expectations (i.e., college enrollment) of them clearly conflicted with the formal expectations recorded on the IEP/ITP (i.e., exemption status from exit exams). Whether she was invited to attend could not be discerned from available data.

Forest, Michael, Tony, Ricky, and Jaime all referred to teachers who provided encouragement and advice. Unlike DeShawn and Martin, these participants made reference to a kind of moral, rather than practical support, offered by teachers. They expressed the closeness they felt with some teachers and the ease with which they could talk to them about their dreams. As far as practical support, only Jaime said he would ask a teacher to help him apply for athletic scholarships. Still, I interviewed him in the fall of his senior year and he was unclear about the availability of such funding.

I Am Self-Determining, but Sometimes It Doesn't Seem to Matter

According to Field (1996), if students are to be self-determining during the transition planning process, the adults (both parents and teachers) must act as facilitators and provide guidance while allowing the student to act as a causal agent. For students and their parents, to be causal agents or guides, however, requires power. As participants' interviews, my observations, and reviews of ITPs revealed, neither the students nor their parents had much power throughout the ITP process.

All discussion was mediated or directed by the special educator whose responsibility it was to complete the IEP/ITP and related forms. Participants had many opportunities to see the ways in which their parents participated in ITP meetings. Teachers frequently asked parents/guardians for input, as in the following example recorded in Joe's meeting:

> Teacher: Now that we have heard the school's concerns, let's hear dad's.
> [Observation Notes, 10/29/02, 52]

Discussions that strayed from the official reason for meeting were often forced by parents/guardians who talked off topic or stated their concerns without prompting. Such was the case in Forest's IEP/ITP meeting. While the special education teacher was conducting a review of the ITP, his grandmother began by stating her concern over his drug use. Similarly, Joe's father began a discussion of a recent family crisis and the priority demands of Joe's psychiatric needs over his academic needs. Ricky's father also forced the topic of discussion prior to the beginning of his son's removal hearing by repeating his concern that his son had no guidance in fulfilling community service requirements.

Even in cases where parents changed the subject of discussion or repeatedly returned to their own concerns, school personnel remained in control of the meeting. Sometimes teachers responded to parents by listening. In Joe's meeting, the teacher asked his father and mental health caseworker to explain in detail the problems Joe was experiencing, as well as how the school could better meet his needs. In response to

Ricky's father's request, the assistant principal gave the family the requested form and reiterated that the community service project was an independent endeavor. She neither offered any apology for inconveniences experienced by the family, nor accepted the family's point of view that the school should have been helping Ricky find community service work. In still other cases, teachers and school personnel addressed family concerns in a very superficial way, or not at all. When Forest's grandmother continually brought up topics of drug abuse and mental illness, teachers responded by telling Forest that he really needed to get his life together and appreciate the care and love of his grandmother. Teachers at this meeting also responded by looking down at the table or at the paperwork, rather than addressing the possibility and availability of drug treatment programs. I did not observe collaborative problem solving at any meeting.

Several times, discussions revealed that the school and the family represented different perspectives or ideas about ways to address areas of concern. For example, during Joe's meeting a lengthy discussion ensued regarding whether the school needed to complete a reevaluation, or whether it would be done by his psychiatrist from the state mental health organization. Protocol, stated in Sections 300.532-300.536 of IDEA (1997), requires that IEP teams review the student's placement in special education on a triennial basis and either: a) decide that the student continues to qualify and there is no need for reevaluation or b) gather additional evaluative data to determine continued

eligibility, present level of performance, or modifications to needed services. Joe was up for reevaluation. The school intended to re-certify his eligibility for special education as a student with LD without additional testing. Upon hearing Joe's father's request, however, they complied with protocol and scheduled an educational reevaluation but suggested that Joe's psychiatrist conduct a complete psychological evaluation.

> The discussion turned into a dialogue between the school psychologist and family advocate from the state's mental health services and Joe's father about whether or not an updated evaluation is necessary or helpful. Joe's father and the family advocate felt that they would qualify for other tutoring services with an update. The school psychologist explained that the current evaluation was technically up-to-date. Much of the discussion centered on the perceptions of Joe's father after meeting with Joe's psychiatrist, who was not present at the meeting. The school psychologist explained that if the psychiatrist had information to share, perhaps she should do the evaluation. Then she mentioned that if she did he might be eligible the category of Emotionally Disturbed and therefore, self-contained classes. Joe's father was clearly confused here.
> [Observation Notes, 10/29/02, 79-86]

A resolution of this issue was that the school psychologist would write a letter to the psychiatrist stating that Joe needed tutoring and that his up-to-date psychological report supported this. While this did seem to satisfy Joe's father, the school psychologist seemed exasperated even though she did offer to comply with his request.

> School Psychologist: I am more than happy to do the testing but it won't tell us anything we don't already know. It will not inform teaching. Reading will be a life-long struggle for Joe, as far as college goes, by-pass strategies…
> [Observation Notes, 10/29/02, 98-100]

The process of this meeting made it difficult for Joe's father to influence services rendered to his son. He had to make a request and provide a rationale. In the end, school personnel complied, but the topic overshadowed the ITP.

The power of school personnel was notable in Ricky's removal hearing. Ricky's father seemed to acknowledge this when, at the beginning of the meeting he referred to the meeting as the school's "party." At this meeting, the entire content was guided by a script prepared by the state and read by one of two assistant principals present. Legal terms such as "manifestation determination" were used repeatedly. The tape recorder (required by district policy in removal meetings) was under the control of school personnel. In fact, the recorder was turned off and on at various times in the meeting, rather than running continuously. Input from Ricky's father was invited in a limited way, via questions prompted by the script.

While exchanges between Ricky and his father and the school personnel illustrated how the family tried to make their needs heard and provide input in decision-making endeavors, it also illustrated how school personnel halted these efforts. Ricky's father openly expressed frustration at his own powerlessness, at times reacting with sarcasm and resignation, while at other times trying to actively take part in the ARD.

> Assistant Principal: Well, as soon as the teachers get here, we'll get started.
> Ricky's father: It's your party…(laughs sarcastically).
> Assistant Principal: Well, sir, it is no party. We are having the manifest determination hearing.
> [Observation Notes, 10/17/02, 55-59]

> Ricky's father: Well, you know, I do not think you should just push these kids out, how about really caring? You know, you change kids' schedules, tell them they are going to be an auto mechanics, and then there are all these changes? And I think this had changed him and his feelings. What about all his feelings? The only thing I can see is that he is into the Dragon Ball Z video game and I don't think he does know, you know what he is saying is different than this game. But I'll vouch for him. I have had him now for 8 years and I think he is a good kid. You know, he not the kind that…He deserves a second chance.
> [Observation Notes, 10/17/02, 93-99]

Ricky's father was visibly angry during parts of the meeting. He shook his head in disagreement, looked up to the ceiling, or used other nonverbal methods of expressing his emotions. Verbally, he stated his frustration and pointed out that his opinions differed from the school's perspective, yet he did not raise his voice. Nevertheless, he was warned by one assistant principal to "be civil." Several times, Ricky's father did attempt to make his presence, and his opinions, known. Each time, however, an assistant principal stopped him.

> Assistant Principal: (turns off tape recorder.) Now the removal will start.
> Father: (Upset and heavy sigh, talking to son.) You already know the decision, she has already decided.
> Teacher: We all have preknowledge of the consequences of this.
> Assistant Principal: (turns tape back on). Now sir, we are here to be civil. Right now we are doing the removal hearing….
> Second Assistant Principal: I am deciding to remove the child because (reads from script the outcome of manifest determination.) He will be placed in alternative learning environment. According to [state] code #, (pauses and asks assistant principal to reread infraction statement. Assistant principal completes this). Do you (addressing father) or Ricky have any comment? (They shake heads no). (Addressing teacher and school psychologist) Does this relate to the child's disability? What support services will be necessary at ALC?

> Teacher: I'd like to refer Ricky to [Communities in Schools] for counseling upon return from [the alternative campus].
> [Observation Notes, 10/17/02, 121-136]

When I asked students how they were expected to act at ARD meetings, they often responded that their parents/guardians wanted them to be polite or agreeable. And although they described politeness as listening rather than talking, they did recount many instances in which their parents/guardians sought their input. Common descriptions of this scenario were when teachers would ask the parents if placement in a certain class was okay, then parents would turn to their children and ask them if they wanted to follow this plan. In these scenarios, students' self-determination was always preceded by an invitation from parents/guardians or teachers to practice self-determination within a prescribed range of options. Examples of self-determination were more like preference statements rather than exercises of self-determination because each was made in the context of choices and options the school defined and offered. For example, students reported that members of the ITP team, including parents, allowed them to choose courses of study, placement in OJT, and postsecondary career goals. They also said parents did not allow them to drop out of school.

An exchange in Ron's meeting provided an example of the subtle ways in which teacher may, perhaps inadvertently, block students' efforts at self-determination. Ron came to the meeting dressed in a matching outfit. The shorts and matching shirt were bright yellow, clean, and crisply pressed. He wore four or five pieces of large, silver jewelry around his neck, and a terrycloth visor on his head. His outward

appearance was similar to many music video artists in the Hip Hop genre of music. Although his style may not have been suitable for some work environments, he was meticulously dressed and he seemed concerned about his appearance. As the teacher, a European American, middle-aged female, described the Job Corps, I observed that she possibly insulted Ron and/or his mother.

> Teacher: Yeah, they used to have problems at the Job Corps. They've really cleaned it up out there, immigrants or felons. You get a certificate and they help you find a job, and you get paid. They get uniforms you know, real nice clean white t-shirts and khaki pants. So they don't have to wear their old clothes.
> Ron and his mother shared a glance and I wondered if they were insulted by the remark? Was the teacher reacting to Ron's style of dress?
> [Observation Notes, 2/6/03, 90-94]

It begs the question: if students' self determination (e.g., how to dress) is called into question, how will they react to subsequent opportunities for self-determination?

More overt examples of curbing students' self-determining efforts happened when teachers and students openly disagreed. In Forest's meeting, he repeatedly made it known that he was struggling with decision-making and needed structure and guidance. Teachers' responses indicated that they did not want to monitor him more carefully, and intimated that receiving such structure would be both unpleasant and detrimental for him. Both the special education teacher and the assistant principal said they *could* implement a contract or behavioral plan but the latter team member added, "if that's what you want…" indicating Forest may later regret the decision. Yet Forest continued to explicitly state that he did not know what he should do, that he needed

guidance. These requests were not taken seriously enough to warrant a plan whereby he would receive what he said he needed. Similarly, when Ricky's teachers asked if he liked art, he was chided for his response and his sincerity was questioned when they acknowledged to one another that he might say that he did not like art for the purpose of being disagreeable.

These examples illustrate how students, and even their parents/guardians, had less power than teachers to determine the agenda of ITP meetings, or to contribute to decisions or products (e.g., ITP goals) that were generated as a result of the meeting. While student participation in the ITP, not that of their parents/guardians, is the subject of this inquiry into self-determination, I have included my observations relative to parent/guardian participation because it is possible that participants based their actions on observations of their parents'/guardians' participation. In interviews, participants discussed responding to the expectations of their parents, and since modeling is one way to communicate expectations, it is plausible that students responded to their parents' loss of power by not exerting any themselves. If students see that their parents' wishes or demands go unmet, they may not believe that they could exercise self-determination within the context of these meetings.

As both observations and participants' comments illustrate, students' power to self-determine was undermined during meetings in several ways. First, discussion often centered on students' weaknesses. Statements about reading levels in the early

elementary grades and attendance problems may have influenced students' thinking about whether they could or should be in charge of important decisions about their future. Sam's story of his indecision about leaving self-contained classes was an example of this. Although he had evidence that his behavior had improved, he continued to doubt his ability to excel, saying that he "obviously" had problems. Although Joe was not present in his ITP meeting, his father sensed that discussing his son's mental health problems might in some way degrade him in the eyes of the people who were responsible for helping him, as the following quote revealed.

> Joe's father: It's hard [to articulate Joe's psychiatric issues] because I don't want to mark him. He is easily persuaded to believe something that is not true. He is seeing a psychiatrist. LD is causing frustration over emotional. He may be bipolar, he may not.
> [Observation Notes, 10/29/02, 62-64]

Secondly, students experienced embarrassment and humiliation from time to time, limiting their power in IEP/ITP meetings. Ricky said that he felt very bad during his removal hearing because he did not mean for his words to be taken seriously. The term "terroristic threat" was repeated over and over again. Since the destruction of the World Trade Center in September, 2001, being associated with terroristic actions embodies the core of what it is to be anti-American. During the removal meeting I observed body language and facial expressions consistent with feelings of dejection and/or humiliation. He said nothing, made contact with no other members of the meeting, turned red, and averted his gaze down at the table or floor.

When Forest's grandmother alluded to his depression and drug-induced lethargy, she told everyone he had stopped cleaning his room and bathing. He was very upset and retorted that all she did was "lay on the couch." Although Forest did not cry, he too turned red. He lost control of his emotions at times raising his voice or blurting insults at his grandmother, contradicting the loving comments he made about her during interviews. Experiencing humiliation and embarrassment is not conducive to self-determination. Participants stated, and I observed, that these situations made them want to withdraw from participating in the meeting.

Thirdly, participants reported that teachers did not respond to their requests or questions about decisions involving their futures. Martin's anecdote about the change in his course of schedule is one example. Martin said that he was definitely going to college, and his independent efforts showed that he was serious about this goal (even though his IEP/ITP categorized him as exempt from exit exams). He had visited campuses and he sought information about college programs based on knowledge of his own strengths and interests. When he was changed from a plan of study involving Spanish classes (indicating college eligibility) to a plan involving no foreign language requirements (indicating college ineligibility), he asked why, but said he did not find much out about the change.

> Audrey: Did they talk about why they were changing your graduation plan and all?
> Martin: No. They said they were changing it but they didn't tell me why.

> Audrey: Did you wonder why? Or were you just like phew! No foreign language!
> Martin: Both. Wondered why and I did want to learn Spanish, but from what they tell me, it is hard. But that wouldn't stop me. I'll just try to take it next year.
> Audrey: Yes. So you might still try to take it?
> Martin: I tried to sign up for it, but they didn't give it to me.
> Audrey: Did you find out why?
> Martin: No. If I try to go in there, they are like, 'You need to come back to us later. We are very busy right now.'
> [Individual Interview, 119-126]

Lastly, participants had experienced being scolded in IEP/ITP meetings. Many of the students reported that they dreaded ARD meetings because they thought teachers would use the opportunity to inform parents of their misbehavior. When Ron's teacher told his mother about his having fallen asleep in school, he felt compelled to defend himself. He did not complain about the class, as he did during the focus group meeting; rather, he told his mother that he was sleepy. Discussion of Forest's drug use exposed his illegal behavior and shamed him. When he repeatedly tried to use this as an opportunity to get help, he was met with criticism and was told to "get it together."

Participants' comments revealed that self-determination efforts outside of ITP meetings were also blocked or disregarded at times. Ron's desire to become involved as a peer tutor for life skills students never came to fruition. Jesus had a similar experience with his efforts to get involved in the OJT program. These two young men, however, dealt with the obstacles to self-determination differently. While Ron gave up on his goal, Jesus found a job on his own, without the support of OJT. Interestingly, he was placed in OJT at a later date, but maintained his full course load.

Examples of imbalances of power both during and outside of IEP/ITP meetings do not rule out that self-determination was not being practiced in other settings, or in ways that were outside of the narrowly defined realm of choices (e.g., course selection) afforded by the ITP team, or in ways that go against the wishes of the ITP team (e.g., deciding to continue problematic behavior). Perhaps self-determination efforts included inaction which is, of course, difficult to observe. For example, perhaps Ron had decided for himself to set goals outside of the choice of Job Corps presented by the VAC at his ITP meeting. If so, perhaps he did not state his alternative aloud. For Ricky, his self-determination included acquiescing to the school's plan, and later coming back to his regular campus to continue working toward graduation. In a later interview, he told me that no matter what his punishment had been, no matter the setback, he would continue to attend school until he met the graduation requirements.

> I know I am not going to drop out even if I do come a couple of more years, I still will be in high school and graduate. I won't ever stop trying to pass, because I want to.
> [Ricky, Individual Interview, 226]

Two Latino students, Tony and Ricky, shared their strategies for self-determination and getting their needs met. Tony made sure he has an "in" with teachers who will help him. Ricky relentlessly reminded teachers of his needs and wants. Nevertheless, as Earl's comment below suggested, participants in this study saw themselves as recipients, rather than causal agents, in formal transition planning.

> [Going to ITP meetings] finding out what they're going to do to me. What they're going to try to do to me.
> [Earl, Individual Interview, 381]

Essentially, members of the transition planning team were entering the process with differing levels of status, experience, and knowledge. Reasons for power inequities were multidimensional. While it is beyond the scope of these data to determine how and to what extent these variables interacted and contributed to the observable and documented unequal distribution of power, the potential importance of this type of analysis is not lost. Rather than providing answers to questions in this area, this analysis will fuel future research questions and study designs, as well as implications for practice.

Each of the themes that I have chosen to represent, based on what I saw as significant or prevalent among participants in this study, has implications for further study and practice in the field of special education and postsecondary transition. Each also contributes to a discussion of the limitations of this study, both of which will be addressed in the next chapter. Additionally, the final chapter contains a discussion of the utility and limitations of the methodology I employed.

CHAPTER SIX

Implications and Limitations

Fifteen high school students with LD shared their perceptions about their roles and responsibilities, as well as those of their parents/guardians and teachers, during the postsecondary transition planning process. Observations and document reviews were used to gather information about the students' self-determining behaviors and the contexts within which they participated in transition planning activities.

Interview data supported the following findings about students' perceptions (across groups) of self-determination:

1. Participants saw themselves as decision-makers and causal agents in their own lives. Still, they remained unaware of formal transition planning procedures and did not connect their own efforts with ITP procedures. Often, their goals and dreams for the future were not substantiated by plans or requisite knowledge and skills.
2. Participants relied on families for transition planning support. These students prioritized emotional support over other supportive actions (e.g., advocating for accommodations or services) and material support, although all three were mentioned.

3. These students provided few anecdotes or examples of close involvement with teachers or other school personnel during transition planning. When they did talk about teachers who significantly impacted their dreams about the future, they referred to these teachers as friends, or people with whom they had close personal relationships.

The purpose of this study was to consider how, and to what extent participants' identities, as indicated by race/ethnicity and socioeconomic class, impacted their perceptions and behaviors to self-determine during postsecondary transition planning activities. Subtle differences were detected during data analysis:

1. African American participants seemed to be more oriented toward the postsecondary goal of attending college. They spoke of their own goals in this area with more specificity than did European Americans or Latinos. They also emphasized the importance of parental expectations on their goals to seek postsecondary education.
2. European American and Latino participants provided more examples of how they consulted with extended family members when considering decisions and making goals for their future. For Latinos, such consultation seemed to be more collaborative, and

they stated their intentions to defer to the expectations and opinions of family members. European Americans, however, talked about seeking advice from family members in regard to plans they had developed independently.

3. African American and Latino participants had more experience with extracurricular activities and part-time employment than European American participants. When discussing their goals for postsecondary education and employment, the later group seemed to base their decisions on activities they found enjoyable or interesting. On the other hand, African American and Latino participants seemed to base their decisions on their experiences and talents/strengths that had been identified in these activities.

The analysis of data should not be interpreted to suggest that differences among groups of participants are limited to the above observations. Rather, this analysis provides an indication that the unique considerations and needs of students, based on their cultural and linguistic identities, to which race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status contribute, should be the subject of further inquiry. While the question of the impact of cultural identity on transition planning styles and preferences was key to this inquiry, the question and its plausible answers were difficult to sort out for a number of reasons.

First, participants across groups experienced very few opportunities to use self-determination skills during transition planning, so detecting differences in their behaviors was challenging. Also, while they expressed their preferences and expectations of their roles, as well as those of their parents/family members and teachers, they had few experiences on which to base the perceptions because their participation in the formal planning process was so limited. That participants were from similar socioeconomic backgrounds may have obscured the impact of race/ethnicity on self-determination. Perhaps social class was more impacting than race/ethnicity. Replicating this study with individuals of different socioeconomic backgrounds is recommended to address this issue.

Additionally, participation and self-determination were mediated to a great extent by opportunities provided by school personnel. Since all of the participants had LD, it is possible that a culture of disability was impacting the perceptions and behaviors of these personnel as they worked on the transition plans of these students. In other words, the students' disability status may have influenced opportunities afforded for participation more significantly than did race/ethnicity or economic status. Research has shown that disability classifications are associated with lower expectations for student performance (Aune & Friehe, 1996). Thus educators may perceive that students with disabilities will have difficulty being self-determining and therefore assume greater responsibility for transition planning and decision-making about students' post-

secondary choices. The effects of disability, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, as well as the interaction of these factors, on teachers' perceptions and behaviors as they encourage or inhibit students' self-determination and participation in the transition planning process merits further study.

The foremost objective of this research project was to gather and analyze adolescents' perspectives on self-determination during postsecondary transition, as their voices have not been adequately documented in special education literature. This naturalistic inquiry also provided important information about the contexts within which students participated in the transition planning process. While the perceptions of students in this small sample cannot be generalized to represent those of all students with LD from these three racial/ethnic groups, they are instructive in the sense that they describe what participants in this study were experiencing and thinking relative to postsecondary transition planning. Their comments can be used to provide both support for existing research and support for expanding the direction of future inquiry. Results from the research activities herein have important implications for practice and research, but they must be interpreted cautiously, as there are many questions that remain unanswered.

Implications for Practice

Focus on the Student, Not the Process

Formal transition planning as experienced by these participants was process-driven and relied too heavily on compliance with the letter of the law, rather than the spirit of the law. Although each of the participants had an ITP, they had not been adequately involved in its development. Rigorous application of preferred practices and legislative mandates can help maximize student involvement and person-centered planning.

Engage students in the ITP process. Results from this study confirm the findings of earlier studies that have documented students' lack of involvement in transition planning (Collet-Klingenberg, 1998; Morningstar et al., 1996; Van Reusen & Bos, 1990). Students should be treated as members of the ITP planning team. Other members of the team should speak directly to the student and inquire about their postsecondary preferences. Goals should be written in such a way that the students are positioned to take action. Students should be included in the "Network of support," which lists team members responsible for taking action toward stated goals. For example, if the goal is to register for the selective service, the student should be one of the parties responsible for goal completion. Goals on ITPs for these participants did not clearly reflect who was expected to reach them, and opportunities for self-determination could not be clearly defined. Including students as the subject of the goal

statements and as persons responsible for taking action toward their goals is an important step in creating ITPs that support self-determination. However, without an appropriate structure, this would be to no end.

Opportunities to include students in transition-related conversations and activities must be arranged on a more frequent basis. Students need ongoing opportunities to reflect on their experiences and discussions about their goals for the future. The ITP team needs to help students see the connection between their plans and goal attainment. Existing research supports the designation of specific personnel to facilitate transition planning efforts (Hasazi et al., 1999). One way to do this would be to designate school personnel (e.g., vocational adjustment coordinator or guidance counselor) to meet with students on a regular basis. This could be done before or after school, during study halls, or lunch breaks. A "pull out" model could be used, but this may not be optimal because students would miss instructional time. If students are enrolled in content mastery or resource classes, it is possible that this type of review could be conducted in these settings. Alternatively, postsecondary goal setting and self-assessment could be embedded in the curriculum of general education classes through career connections and subject-related explorations, project-based learning, and problem-solving activities. This option may be difficult to implement because standards for courses of study have become increasingly complex as they are connected to end-of-course and exit examinations.

Involving students in projects that provide opportunities for them to explore and demonstrate an understanding of their rights as people with a disabilities is another way this objective could be met. For example, students could create a student-authored website that provides a summary of educational rights for students with disabilities. Coaching and guidance for this type of project, however, takes time. If students are enrolled in general education classes, or are frequently away from campus participating in vocational programs, time for these endeavors may be limited.

Vocational education has been considered a contributor to post-secondary success for students with disabilities (Benz et al., 2000). Given the fact that many of the participants (majority African American and Latino) were enrolled in vocational education courses and programs such as OJT, it is important that the information and services provided in these programs are closely aligned with the needs of the students. The curriculum of these courses needs to be aligned with individual transition goals and objectives. For example, if the ITP team determines that a student like Joe needs to develop employment-related social skills, these skills should be addressed in his vocational education course.

Follow guidelines for compliance. While implications of the results of this study suggest that teachers should focus on the individual rather than the process, the process should not be disregarded. Instead, these data agree with existing research that supports a relevant and engaging process for the student (Benz et al., 2000; Hasazi et al., 1999).

Four participants had ITPs that had not been reviewed in excess of one year. In a separate issue, one student did not attend his transition meeting because school personnel convened while he was on a field trip. These are examples of cases in which the transition protocol, as detailed in the 1997 Amendments to IDEA, was not followed.

One important aspect of legislative protocol is the age at which ITPs are generated. Preferred practices (Collet-Klingenberg, 1998) and mandates included in IDEA (1997) support a case for transition planning to begin early in students' high school careers. Specifically, Section 614 (vii) (II) of IDEA (1997) states "Beginning at age 16 (or younger, if determined appropriate by the IEP team)," students will have an ITP. Nine participants' ITPs were developed shortly before they turned 17. Earlier planning would provide more opportunities for students to participate in ITP meetings and gain familiarity with the plan and its potential uses, as well as provide more time to meet prerequisites necessary for postsecondary educational goals.

Individualize ITPs. Students in this study felt disengaged from the process, in part because they saw little connection between what they wanted to do and what they were expected to do. Although they did not know their ITPs were nearly identical, they were able to articulate that their ITPs were not important to them. Individualization, an approach that has prevailed in special education for over a decade, should be within the capabilities of teachers, school psychologists, counselors, and administrators in this field.

Transition plans should be designed to address the specific strengths and needs of individual students. Toward this end, it is preferable to avoid the use of a "master" ITP with recommended goals already recorded on the form. Rather, the team should generate the ITP collaboratively and revisit goals annually. Instead of using the initial ITP as a checklist for subsequent years, meaningful discussion about the ITP should include the review of existing goals and the possible inclusion of new or updated goals. Once a goal is accomplished, it should be removed from the ITP. If progress toward a goal is not being made, the team needs to engage in problem solving and perhaps adjust existing goals.

Increase parent and family involvement. Participants gave many examples of ways in which they engaged in informal transition planning with members of their families. These findings are in agreement with previous studies that have demonstrated the importance of family and career choices and transition planning support (Morningstar et al., 1995). These young men emphasized the significance of their familial relationships in determining postsecondary goals and taking action toward goal attainment. The connection between the transitional groundwork accomplished at home (e.g., sibling modeling, parental expectations of college enrollment) was lost within the context of school. Parents/guardians and extended family members need to be welcomed as members of the ITP team who have valuable information to contribute to

transition planning discussions. Perhaps students could invite team members from their home communities (e.g., an older sibling, an uncle) to their IEP/ITP meetings.

Existing research has documented that parent participation and involvement in the special education process is itself embedded with cultural values that are not universal (Harry, 1992; Harry et al., 1999). Schools should support parental involvement in alternative ways that meet the needs and preferences of CLD families. For example, they could encourage students to discuss postsecondary options with family members and share this information during planning activities. School personnel could also converse with students about these topics. Conversations should include questions about students' plans for the future and how these plans coincide with home communities. Participants in this study were quite willing to discuss the topic and several said that they enjoyed our conversations, indicating their willingness to engage this type of discussion.

By broadening the definition of parental involvement, school personnel will be taking an important step toward cultural reciprocity. Past research has demonstrated that if parent involvement is narrowly defined, some families will opt not to conform to the schools' notion of involvement (Geenen, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez, 2001). Subtle differences among groups of participants in this study provided more evidence that values embedded in the special education system are not universal. School personnel need to understand the values and beliefs of the people they serve. Students' comments

reflected numerous instances in which their self-determination skills were fostered at home. If teachers understood how and to what extent students were practicing self-determination at home, their efforts to foster these skills could compliment what the student already knows.

Families and school personnel need to engage in explicit discussions regarding the implementation of students' IEP/ITPs. Parents need to know the implications of enrollment in programs such as OJT, or the exit test exemption status of their children. Realistically, effective communication of this type of information may require multiple contacts or the use of multiple modes of communication. School personnel should foster networks of support among parents. Care would need to be given to protect confidentiality, but organizing a parent support group to share information specific to the implementation of special education issues does not seem impossible.

During ITP meetings, parents should be given the opportunity to be active participants. Although parents/guardians were listed on ITPs as parties responsible for assisting participants in their efforts to attain goals, they were not asked about the progress being made toward these goals. More thorough discussion might engage students and their parents/guardians, and at the same time, relieve teachers of some of the pressure of being responsible for entire plan.

Utilize tools for collaboration. The importance of collaboration between home and school cannot be overstated. Collaboration requires open and frequent

communication between home and school. Utilizing effective cross-cultural communication skills is also essential if teachers and families have dissimilar cultural backgrounds. Participants, parents/guardians, and school personnel in this study appeared to need more opportunities to discuss problematic situations. Engaging in more frequent communication might help team members avoid using the annual IEP/ITP meeting for crisis intervention.

School personnel must adopt a strength-based stance toward their students with disabilities, CLD families, and people who are living in poverty. They also need to acknowledge that families and students are valuable contributors to the transition planning process. Without this acknowledgement, true collaboration cannot transpire. Input from families, whatever the mode, is crucial to providing opportunities for successful postsecondary transition. Participants' comments were in accordance with previous studies that have shown CLD parents encourage academic achievement in their children and do engage in planning activities (Geenen et al., 2001). Yet, the comments of participants in this study also reveal that their parents may have limited knowledge about the steps necessary for their children to attain these goals. As Stanton-Salazar (2001) points out, resources and support networks need to stretch beyond any single community in order to maximize opportunities for students, particularly those who are not members of the dominant group. Bridging the resources of school personnel with the resources of people from the home community increases the

likelihood that students will have the opportunity to pursue a variety of relevant postsecondary opportunities.

Require multidisciplinary ITP team membership. The absence of meaningful participation by ITP team members other than special education teachers negatively impacted the development of participants' ITPs. Much of the transition research has focused on the need for ITP teams to include collaborators from other agencies (Collet-Klingenberg, 1998). While this is important for reasons discussed in previous chapters, these participants' needed input from members of their own school communities during ITP meetings. Most participants did access general education classes through inclusion programs and general education placement. General educators need to provide important information as members of ITP teams. Equally important, these professionals can gain crucial information about the student from their membership on the IEP/ITP team. Participants repeatedly commented that their teachers were unaware of their goals. The potential for collaboration between general and special educators fell short of being realized in many of the students' experiences. While Forest, Martin, and DeShawn all spoke highly of general educators that had inspired them to set goals for postsecondary education, these relationships existed outside of the formal transition planning process and their efficacy was minimized.

Critically Examine the Self-Determination

Self-determination is a basic human right (Wehmeyer, 1992). When students practice self-determination without necessary knowledge and experience to make sound decisions or to address transition goals proactively, the results have serious implications. Educators and administrators in both general and special education should consider the complex issues surrounding self-determination of students with disabilities during postsecondary transition planning. Consideration for these issues has the potential to improve implementation of both self-determination and transition planning.

Define requisite conditions. As participants consistently demonstrated, opportunities for involvement at the level of self-determination during postsecondary transition planning was heavily reliant upon the opportunities provided to them by members of the IEP/ITP teams. Participants repeatedly talked about making their own decisions, usually with the cooperation or consent of their parents, but these decisions were not always recognized or supported by school personnel. These results appear to be in conflict with several previous studies that documented teachers' facilitative efforts of student self-determination (Hasazi et al., 1999; Zhang, Katsiyannis, & Zhang, 2002). It is important for school personnel to determine necessary conditions for students' application of self-determination skills. Results indicated that increasing the amount of time students have to consider their goals and plans for goal attainment is necessary. Results also indicated that students need more explicit instruction in this

area. Schools also need to determine which personnel (in both general and special) education will be responsible for guiding students.

Describe the parameters. ITP teams need to describe the domains in which students are expected to apply self-determination skills. For example, most of the literature addresses career and education domains for self-determination; however, the possibility exists that students use or attempt self-determination in other areas. If Ricky had been allowed to self-determine during his removal hearing, he may have been able to articulate his desire to address his behavioral goals within the context of his school. School personnel decided for him, however, that he would be required to address those goals at the alternative campus as punishment for his infraction. School personnel, therefore, may need to clearly delineate when it is appropriate for students to use self-determination strategies and state these expectations explicitly.

If self-determination during transition planning is limited to course selection, it may be more appropriate to frame this in terms of student preferences or choices. Self-determination is more complex than selecting electives. While participants in this study did have the opportunity to express preferences, other key component skills of self-determination, such as self-assessment and goal realignment, were missing.

Acknowledge limitations. Without knowledge, practice, guidance, and opportunity, students cannot experience the maximum benefits of self-determination. Involving students as causal agents in the implementation of transition planning is a

complex goal. This complexity needs to be acknowledged and studied so that students are not put in the position of making detrimental decisions in the name of self-determination. When school personnel and students define conflicting exit goals, self-determination might be impeded. In Martin's case, he wanted to take Spanish and he intended to pursue a college degree. The school thought differently and took action to change the direction of his high school trajectory. Reasons for different expectations need to be thoroughly discussed so that students understand why school personnel support alternative decisions.

School personnel need to explore how and to what extent self-determination is limited by systemic barriers. For example, manifestation determination hearings do not allow for student self-determination. Similarly, schools need to consider that students' self-determination could result in infraction of rules, as it did when Thomas used his personal stereo at school to provide background noise. Given the school rules, he was not allowed to make that decision, regardless of his rationale for doing so. His rationale demonstrated his use of important self-determination skills such as self-knowledge, knowledge of disability, and acceptance of learning style. While he acted in a self-determining way, he simultaneously broke a school rule. Members of the ITP team need to scrutinize the systemic barriers and decide which, if any, can be changed to increase the opportunity for student self-determination. They also need to explicitly state when self-determination cannot outweigh school protocol.

Increase teacher/administrator awareness. Implementing self-determination is challenging for teachers and other school personnel who may not have an adequate understanding of the concept. Existing research has documented that although teachers support the idea of self-determination, they are unsure about their role as facilitators or inhibitors of self-determining activities (Thoma, et al., 2002). Special education literature on student-led conferences addresses how teachers can promote a more collaborative stance and allow students to accept responsibility during ITP meetings (Bassett & Lehmann, 2002). Staff development efforts should use this body of work to better inform all potential members of the ITP team about self-determination. Preservice teachers also need to be taught skills and attitudes that facilitate self-determination of students.

Promoting self-determination among students with LD involves authorizing their perspectives. Doing this has value in the classroom as well as in the larger field of education (Cook-Sather, 2002). The task of listening to students, however, is not easy. Structures that have been determined by adults need to be questioned, and adults must be willing to restructure their own ways of thinking (Cook-Sather, 2002). Listening to what students have to say within the current confines of adults' preconceived ideas of how education should happen cannot be maximally productive or meaningful. Increasing opportunities for students with disabilities to act as causal agents and

practice self-determination will require restructuring the system. Further research should inform this endeavor.

Implications for Research

Students in this study were practicing self-determination with various levels of competency, but their efforts were inhibited largely by contextual variables. The study of self-determination in special education needs to focus more specifically on the contexts in which self-determination is currently practiced. To date, self-determination models focus on the individual, and what characteristics he/she has, or needs to develop, that will promote decision-making, goal setting, and self-assessment. Field and Hoffman (1994) and many others have designed programs to develop self-determination skill levels of students. In some cases, model programs address parenting skills that facilitate self-determination (Ludi & Martin, 1995; Serna & Lau-Smith, 1995). As the comments and experiences of participants demonstrated, however, many obstacles to self-determination occurred in the context of school, rather than home. In fact, this aspect of the data reported here differs from previous studies that indicated parents do not provide self-determination experiences (Zhang et al., 2002). Also, participants in this study, unlike those in previous research (Morningstar et al., 1995), were able to provide examples of strategies their parents used (e.g., conversing about choices, encouraging expression of their perspectives in ITP meetings, and helping them self-assess) to assist them in practicing self-determination.

Characteristics of the environmental or contextual backdrops within which we expect students to practice self-determination need to be carefully examined. With respect to the transition planning process, special education self-determination research should include a more thorough examination of the impact of these contexts on students' self-determination efforts as well as the impact they have on transition planning efforts. Future research needs to address important questions about factors that inhibit or facilitate self-determination, and the costs and benefits to students with LD.

Inhibitors and Facilitators of Self-Determination

As researchers embarked on the study of self-determination, they aimed to define the construct and determine its requisite skills so that they could provide practitioners with rationales and programs that supported student involvement in the special education process. By focusing on characteristics of the learner, or person with a disability, however, less thorough examination of contexts in which the learner must act has been conducted. As data collected here revealed, students practiced self-determination, and they did employ some requisite skills (e.g., knowledge of self) at various levels of competency. Still, self-determination efforts were not always supported because systemic variables inhibited these experiences.

The time required for students and ITP team members to collaboratively develop ITPs and then actualize those plans seemed unavailable to students in this study. This may be particularly problematic for students with LD who are included in

general education courses (sometimes for the entire school day, throughout high school, like DeShawn). Also, many participants were experiencing academic failure which required time (both for instruction and discussion) for problem solving and remediation. Research should be conducted to determine how participation in special education accommodates multiple demands on students' time. It is possible that time was available, but that these tasks were not given priority, and therefore were not addressed. Conducting studies to determine how instructional time is spent for students with LD could be useful in determining how and when to implement instruction and guidance of self-determination strategies for postsecondary transition planning.

If students are commonly enrolled in study skills classes or vocational education classes, the curricula of the courses should also be studied. Models for the instruction of self-determination may be able to fit with the existing curricula, or these curricula could be expanded to include them (Field et al., 1998). Furthermore, the implementation of consultation between special educators and their students needs to be more thoroughly documented. If teachers meet with students on a regular basis, both self-determination and postsecondary transition planning would be appropriate topics for discussion and skill development. Doing so would address obstacles, such as unfamiliarity with the ITP and unawareness of requisites for goal attainment that were the result of infrequent review and discussion of ITP content.

Results from this study confirm previous research: ITP team members themselves have the potential to either facilitate or hinder self-determination efforts of students (Field et al., 1998). Anecdotes participants shared revealed that school personnel used deficit models in their approaches, focusing on students' weaknesses. Participants indicated that teachers did not acknowledge their attempts at self-determination. It is important to know if these situations occurred as a result of students setting unrealistic goals or making choices that were difficult to facilitate, or whether teachers did not know how to meet the challenges posed by students' self-determination. In regard to the mismatch of participants' intentions to attend college and exit test exemption status, we need to know if teacher expectations were low and predisposed against students with LD going to college, whether the testing system could not be navigated by students with LD, whether teachers' perceptions were biased against students of color, or whether a combination of these and other variables acted as obstacles to students' fulfillment of this goal. Interviewing adult ITP team members to determine what factors contributed to their decision-making process relative to exit tests is worthy of research. Additional research should examine how school personnel perceive students' self-determination efforts, to what extent they are willing to support and enhance these efforts, and what skills they need to develop to be able to do so.

A possible facilitator of self-determination during postsecondary transition planning might be the ability of school personnel to demonstrate their genuine care for

students, particularly for students of color. Throughout this study, participants across groups discussed the importance of caring relationships between themselves and their parents/guardians and teachers. In particular, students' perceptions of teachers who contributed to their plans for the future generally focused on teachers they described as caring individuals. Perhaps students were making the point that they place more emphasis and significance on the relational aspects of learning. This conclusion mirrors the perspectives of general education U.S.-Mexican students in Valenzuela's (1999) study. While the subject of caring has been a topic of discussion in general education research, it has not been extensively addressed in special education research. Research could describe and/or measure the efficacy of implementing a pedagogy of caring and its effects on students' self-determination and participation in transition planning.

Because promoting self-determination requires a significant shift in teacher roles and responsibilities a change in paradigms may be needed. The shift toward social constructivism and the study of disability (Torres-Velasquez, 1999) has the potential to impact the attitudes of educators', including preservice teachers', so that they employ strength-based models as they work with people with disabilities. Being able to identify strengths in adolescents with disabilities is necessary for supporting self-determination. Research should be conducted to determine what specific teacher attitudes and skills are facilitative of self-determination. Also deserving of inquiry is the development of models that increase educators' acquisition of these attitudes and skills.

The extent to which power and self-determination are interrelated has not been sufficiently explored in special education research. Again, the prevailing models have presented self-determination as a composite of individual characteristics, skills, and/or attitudes. A broader conceptualization is necessary in order to create more complete and more useful models of self-determination. Demonstrating self-knowledge, setting and maintaining goals, and self-assessing do not sufficiently describe contributors to self-determination perceptions and behaviors. A more detailed picture of contextual variables such as those pertaining to school and home communities need to be examined.

While participants across groups shared many perceptions and experiences about self-determination, subtle differences in the way students responded to self-determination opportunities and transition planning activities were evident. Variability has been previously documented in relation to parent participation (Geenen et al., 2001), but this study expands the current body of work in this field by providing the additional perspectives of students. It is important to continue to research ways in which groups differ so that recommended practices can better meet the needs of a diverse student body. In addition to exploring ways in which cultural identity might impact self-determination preferences (e.g., interdependent/independent orientation), self-determination research should also explore how and to what extent societal variables (e.g., racism) exert influence on this construct. Exploring the needs of African

Americans and Latinos, as well as members of other racial/ethnic groups, are central to better serving these populations who tend to be disproportionately represented in programs for students with LD. These points of inquiry should also be extended to examine the effect of social class on self-determination preferences of students. Furthermore, school cultures, and the culture of special education, should also be studied.

The issue of exit exam exemption reiterates the importance of race/ethnicity as a contextual variable. Because the data collected here suggested that the race/ethnicity of a student could have been a contributing factor to this decision, this question is worthy of further inquiry. While African American participants in this study were most adamant about enrolling in college (three of the four had made individual efforts to realize this goal) they, along with their Latino peers, were exempted from exit tests more frequently than their European American peers. This decision, discussed only briefly during ITP meetings, had the potential to negate self-determination efforts of students like Martin and Tony who had been independently gathering information about postsecondary educational opportunities and dreaming about going to college. Perhaps the most tragic part of their stories was that these students fully believed that they were going to enroll in college just like their peers, having no idea of the implications of their exemption status.

Costs and Benefits of Self-Determination

Analysis of self-determination efforts during postsecondary transition revealed both benefits and costs to students. Participants practiced self-determination with little guidance in the school setting, and as a result they made decisions that had the potential to compromise their ability to attain their goals. For example, Trent wanted to enroll in Air Force Academy after he finishes high school, but he did not join the extracurricular ROTC organization. Doing so would have allowed him to document experience and extracurricular involvement on his application to the academy, increasing his competitive edge. Research could be used to describe what type and to what extent guidance accompanies self-determination.

Most adolescents experience risks associated with self-determination and have the potential to make errors in judgment that impact goal setting and goal attainment. Ironically, students with LD, for whom a lack of self-determination skills has been documented, are being asked to use self-determination to make decisions about their educational programs in ways that exceed the expectations for students without disabilities. Research must go further and help educators support self-determination in such a way that risks are minimized.

Research that documented self-determination resulting from the inexperience or unavailability of parents to act as advocates or guides for their children is crucial. The data gathered here augmented existing studies (Geenen et al., 2001). If parents are

unfamiliar with the special education system or unavailable to attend meetings, self-determination may become a default mode for students. In this study, Latinos were enrolled in the OJT program at higher rates than their African American and European American peers, and without exception, they said that they self-advocated to get involved in the program. Perhaps they made this decision based on complete information, but it is possible that they and their parents were unaware of the likelihood that students in OJT do not take exit exams and are not expected to go to college. The same might have been true for Earl, whose parents did not attend ITP meetings.

Past research regarding vocational education has questioned the merit of these programs and their ability to help develop skills needed for jobs beyond entry-level positions (Valdez, 2000). For high school students in this study, OJT promised early release times and assistance finding employment. For students who have financial needs, such as the need to supplement family incomes, this program was enticing. Participants wanted to work instead of taking academic courses in which they might experience, or have already experienced, failure or difficulty.

Questioning the benefit of self-determination for people with disabilities is problematic. As a result of ableism and discrimination, people with disabilities have historically had relatively little control over their own lives (Wehmeyer, 1992). Determining risks and risk factors, however, should not be construed as an effort to limit students' self-determination during postsecondary transition. Understanding what

support and guidance measures are being implemented, as well as those that may be missing, can help inform practice.

Limitations

The results of this study describe participants' experiences and perceptions. As such, they are meant to serve as a guide to future studies about students' perspectives of self-determination during postsecondary transition planning. As with any study, certain methodological limitations have impacted the results, and these are discussed here in an effort to increase the trustworthiness of the study by providing an open and detailed account of what transpired.

The nature of purposive sampling could have impacted the types of results I obtained from students. Recruitment of participants was designed to be conducted using pools of all available students who met the study's criteria for participation. As required by the district, teachers at each site conducted recruitment procedures. Perhaps recruiting teachers approached students with whom they had greater contact, or those they knew well or could more easily persuade to join the study. On several occassions, these teachers made comments to me such as, "He would be a good one. He's really nice." Or "I don't know if you'd want to talk to him." When this occurred, I reminded them that I was interested in including any student who met the criteria, and I asked them to make participation in the study available to all students in this group. Yet, there are no assurances that all students had equal opportunity to be chosen for participation.

While every effort was made to increase trustworthiness between the participants with whom I conversed and myself as a researcher, certain issues remained. I grew increasingly comfortable as the process continued and I gained experience, so perhaps those interviews that were conducted toward the end were better than those conducted toward the beginning.

Throughout the study, I was concerned about my positionality as an outsider. Whether or not participants felt comfortable with me, a European American female, is difficult to say. Some seemed more so than others. In particular, I perceived less distance between myself and African American and European American participants. The Latino young men demonstrated more reticence during individual interviews and a few seemed nervous. Their interviews, as a group, were shorter in length. Being an outsider seemed to be less of an issue during focus group interviews, perhaps because of the presence of the moderator aides. Their participation seemed to be conducive to a more relaxed atmosphere, either because I felt more confident or because participants responded to the moderator aid, who shared aspects of their cultural identities. Additionally, moderator aides did have the opportunity to clarify cross-cultural communication misunderstandings and debrief with me regarding their perceptions of the impact of race/ethnicity in focus group discussions. In subsequent research projects of similar design, I would include moderator aides in individual interviews.

I maintain caution in regard to my interpretation of the data as a European American researcher studying the perceptions and behaviors of people of color. While I did take care to collaborate with other researchers and insiders from these groups as I conducted the study and analysis of results, my position as an outsider should be noted as a possible limitation. I did, however, take action to minimize these limitations. As I collected data, I made every attempt to be mindful of my own stereotypical thinking as I recorded my thoughts and reactions in my field notes journal. I tried to avoid tendencies to interpret peoples' behaviors accordingly, and in my notes posited alternative interpretations to my initial reactions. Additionally, I attempted to tolerate ambiguity, another cross-cultural communication skill suggested in the literature (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). Rather than jumping to conclusions during communicative encounters I tried to remain open-minded, ask probing questions, and listen to student responses during follow-up interviews. I also checked my perceptions with moderator aides, members, and experienced researchers.

Other limitations included the depth of the document review and observation data. While these were valuable sources of information, they were somewhat decontextualized because I did not include all ITP team members as participants in the study. While reviewing documents, I did not have access to the decision making process that contributed to ITP content. During observations, I was unaware of the histories and the relationships shared by committee members, which could have

contributed to their participation. I have taken care not to overextend the data, as I was unable to ascertain the motivation of ITP committee members to make decisions that seemed to interfere with students' self-determination efforts. In future research projects, it would be helpful to debrief with each of the members of the ITP teams.

Perhaps the biggest limitation to the observation data is that opportunities for me to conduct observations were limited. Each of the observations I was able to complete provided rich information about the participants and helped me triangulate interview data. These experiences allowed me to see how and to what extent students participated in transition planning and whether their perceptions about the roles of ITP members appeared to be accurate.

This study represents a somewhat narrow view of the transition planning process because I did not include the perspectives of the teachers or parents/guardians of the participants. This limitation should actually be considered as a direction for future research. For the purposes of the work included here, I wanted to make the perspectives of students the key focus of inquiry.

In a future research project I would like to conduct an ethnography of the special education transition planning process at several schools. An ethnographic approach would augment my understanding of school cultures at each site and increase the depth of data. This methodology would also provide additional information to use

in the analysis of the distribution of power, and in the analysis of self-determination based on participants' race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status.

Significance

Upon considering the limitations to this study, it is important to note that the results and their implications gleaned from the research activities herein do have value. Perspectives of the participants are useful in the exploration of self-determination in the field of special education. Few other studies have included in-depth reporting and analysis of the perspectives of the students themselves. Furthermore, previous self-determination research and model development in this field has focused on individual characteristics. This study confirms another area in need of further exploration: the environmental or contextual variables within which students are expected to exercise self-determination. Furthermore, the study contributes to the complexity of the discussion surrounding the construct of self-determination.

APPENDIX A

Document Review Form: ITP/IEP

Participant #
Date collected:
(Selected answers are highlighted.)
Type of form: IEP ITP
Developed Date:
Reviewed/Updated Date:
Reviewed/Updated Date:
The student attended the meeting. YES No
Other steps that were taken to ensure student's preferences and interest consideration:

- Interview
- Student Preference Survey
- Functional Vocational Evaluation
- Telephone Contact
- None checked

Grade/age at time of form:
Signatures:

- Student
- Parent (mom & dad)
- Other Special Ed. Chair
- Special Education Teacher
- General Education Teacher
- Vocational Adjustment Coordinator
- Other Agency Representative

Notes from meeting:

Agency Reps invited to attend:

Student Expectations after Exiting Public School:

I. Integrate Employment • Competitive employment, no support • Competitive employment, limited support • Supported employment • Other:	V. Transportation • Driver's license • Specialized transportation • Public transportation • Family transport • Other:
II. Independent Living • Independent, no support • Independent with support • Family/relative • Supervised living • Group Home (ICF/HCS) • ICF-MR (on going support) • Other:	VI. Income/resources • Earned wages • SSI/SSDI • Unearned income (gifts, family) • Trust/will • Public assistance (food stamps) • PASS/IRWE • Other:
III. Recreation/Leisure • Independent • Family supported • Specialized recreation for persons with disabilities • Community parks and recreation programs • Local clubs and associations • Other:	VII. Medical • Group insurance • Assistive/adaptive devices • OT/PT • Vision/hearing/speech • Medical supervision and scheduling • Other:
IV. Postsecondary Educations • Community college • Vocational/Technical School • Junior college • University • Day Program • Continuing Education in adult living skills • Military	VIII. Other Considerations • Guardianship • Counseling/support services • Respite services • Voter registration • Selective service

Area I: Employment

Service	Network of Support	Begin date	End date	Year 2/Year 3

Area II: Independent living

Service	Network of Support	Begin date	End date	Year 2/Year 3

Area III: Recreation/Leisure

Service	Network of Support	Begin date	End date	Year 2/Year 3

Area IV: Postsecondary Education

Service	Network of Support	Begin date	End date	Year 2/Year 3

Area V: Transportation

Service	Network of Support	Begin date	End date	Year 2/Year 3

Area VI: Income/Resources

Service	Network of Support	Begin date	End date	Year 2/Year 3

Area VII: Medical

Service	Network of Support	Begin date	End date	Year 2/Year 3

Area VIII. Other

Service	Network of Support	Begin date	End date	Year 2/Year 3

APPENDIX B

Focus Group Interview Protocol

1. Imagine yourself five years from now. Where do you see yourself? What do you see in your future?
2. What are your dreams and hopes for the future?
3. How do you communicate these dreams and hopes to you mom and dad? How about to your teachers?
4. Who else do you talk to about your future goals?
5. I know you have all had the opportunity to go to an ARD meeting. Tell me what you think about going to ARDs.
    a. Why do you go to ARDs?
    b. How do you participate?
    c. What is the best/worst thing about going to an ARD?
6. What does the term "transition plan" mean to you?
7. What is transition planning at an ARD?
8. What kind of decisions are you able to make about your school life? Home life?
9. Tell me what a person has to do to make their future plans become a reality. (Tell me how you plan to reach your goals.)
10. What motivates you to reach your goals?

11. How do you know what your parents' expectations of you are? Your teachers' expectations?
12. What are some decisions you would like your parents to make for you? How about your teachers?
13. What decisions do you or would you want to make for yourself?
14. If you could make any request of important adults in your life, how would you want them to help you to reach your future goals?

APPENDIX C

Cover Letters and Consent Forms

Phase I Cover Letter in Spanish and English

Estimados Padres o Guardianes Legales:

Su hijo ha sido invitado a participar en una investigación de la Universidad de Tejas. La investigadora, una estudiante de la universidad, está interesada en los alumnos con discapacidades y cómo estos alumnos planean para su futuro. La investigación tiene el potencial de proveer información importante para los maestros cuando ayuden a los alumnos a planear para la vida adulta. Al dar su permiso para que su hijo participe, permite que la investigadora observe la reunión del plan individual, lea el plan de transición, y tenga una entrevista con su hijo. A cambio, de su participación, su hijo recibirá un certificado para una tienda departamental. No tiene que dar permiso si no quiere.

Adjunta a esta carta encontrará una descripción detallada de la investigación y una forma de permiso. La investigadora le llamará pronto.

Gracias por su consideración a este asunto.

Audrey Trainor

Dear Parents/Guardians:

Your son has been invited to participate in a research project at the University of Texas. The researcher, a student at UT, is interested in students with learning disabilities and how they plan for their futures. The study has the potential to provide important information to teachers as they help students transition from high school to adulthood. By giving your permission for your son to participate in this study, you are allowing the researcher to observe the Individual Transition Planning meeting, read the ITP form and interview your son. In return, he will receive a gift certificate to a local department store. You are in no way obligated to give your permission.

Enclosed you will find a detailed description of the study and a permission form. In a few days, you will receive a call from Audrey Trainor, the student who is conducting the study.

Thanks for your consideration,

Audrey Trainor

Phase II Cover Letter in Spanish and English

Estimados Padres o Guardianes Legales:

Su hijo ha sido invitado a participar en una investigación de la Universidad de Tejas. La investigadora, una estudiante de la universidad, está interesada en los alumnos con discapacidades y cómo estos alumnos planean para su futuro. La investigación tiene el potencial de proveer información importante para los maestros cuando ayuden a los alumnos a planear para la vida adulta. Al dar su permiso para que su hijo participe, permite que la investigadora observe la reunión del plan individual, lea el plan de transición, y tenga una entrevista con su hijo. A cambio de su participación, su hijo recibirá un certificado para una tienda departamental. No tiene que dar permiso si no quiere. Si prefiere que no le llamo, llama 414-7854 y deja un mensaje de eso.

Adjunta a esta carta encontrará una descripción detallada de la investigación y una forma de permiso. En la semana proxima, voy a llamarle para discutir esta oportunidad y responder a algunas preguntas si tiene.

Gracias por su consideración a este asunto.

Firma y nombre

Maestra de educacíon especial

Nombre de escuela

Dear Parents/Guardians and Students:

You have been invited to participate in a research project at the University of Texas. The researcher, a student at UT, is interested in students with learning disabilities and how they plan for the future. This study has the potential to provide important information to teachers as they help students transition from high school to adulthood. By giving your permission for your son to participate in this study, you are allowing the researcher to observe the Individual Transition Plan meeting, read the ITP form, and interview your son. In return, he will receive a gift certificate to a local department store. You are in no way obligated to give your permission. In fact, if you would prefer not to be called by me in regard to this study, please call the school at 414-7854 and leave a message to that effect.

Enclosed you will find a detailed description of the study and a permission form. In a few days, I'll be giving you a call to see if you have any questions or concerns.

Thanks for your consideration,

Signature and Name

Special Education Teacher

Name of High School

IRB# 2002-03-0053
Permiso Para Participacíón en una Investigacíón
FORMA DE PERMISO, La Universidad de Tejas en Austin

Se le está pidiendo a usted permiso para la participación de su hijo(a) en una investigación escolar. Esta forma le proporciona información acerca de la investigación. La investigadora principal (la persona a cargo de la investigación) le describirá a usted la investigación y responderá a todas sus preguntas. Por favor, lea la información que sigue y haga preguntas de cualquier cosa que usted no entienda antes de que decida participar. Su permiso para la participación de su hijo(a) es voluntario y puede rehusarse a participar sin castigo o pérdida de beneficios que ahora tiene.

Título de la Investigacíón:
Planeando para la Vida Adulta: Preferencias de Auto-determinación y Comportamientos de Alumnos con Discapacidades en el Aprendizaje

Investigadora(s) Principales y Número(s) de Teléfono(s):
Audrey Trainor, Estudiante 474-0159
Alba Ortiz, Profesora. 471-6244

Fuente de fondos:
La investigación no tiene fondos.

¿Cuál es el propósito de la investigación?
Esta investigación es una parte de mi trabajo para completar mi programa de doctorado. Soy estudiante en la Universidad de Tejas en el Colegio de Educación. Les estoy pidiendo su permiso para la participación de su hijo en mi investigación porque su hijo es un estudiante de secundaria/preparatoria que recibe servicios de educación especial. El o ella estarán involucrados en la planeación de lo que harán después de la escuela secundaria/preparatoria. Yo espero incluír de quince a dieciocho alumnos en esta investigación.

El propósito de esta investigación es examinar las prácticas y percepciones de auto-determinación de los alumnos Afro Americanos, Hispanos y Blancos durante el cambio de la escuela secundaria/preparatoria a la vida adulta. Esta investigación aplica la pregunta de ¿Cómo afecta la raza/identidad étnica el uso de auto-determinación durante la preparación para la transición después de la escuela secundaria/preparatoria?

¿Qué se hará si su hijo(a) participa en esta investigación?
Este proyecto de investigación incluye dos reuniones. La investigación se llevará a cabo en la Primavera y Otoño del 2002. Durante este tiempo, necesitaré la participación de los alumnos en las siguientes actividades:

1. Entrevistas con grupos: Su hijo(a) participará en una entrevista en grupo con cinco o seis más alumnos parecidos. La entrevista tomará aproximadamente una hora y media después de escuela. El grupo se reunirá solamente una vez y la reunión será en algún área de la escuela o la biblioteca. Voy a grabar las entrevistas en video.

2. Entrevistas individuales de seguimiento: Yo me pondré en contacto con cada alumno después de la entrevista del grupo para hacer arreglos para una entrevista de seguimiento. Esta entrevista tomará aproximadamente una hora o menos y también será grabada en video. El propósito de esta entrevista es darle la oportunidad a los participantes de que comenten y reflexionen acerca de sus comentarios en las entrevistas de grupo. Esto puede hacerse en la casa de el(la) participante, por teléfono, o algún otro lugar conveniente.

Temas que se discutirán durante las entrevistas de grupo incluyen:

- Los planes de los alumnos para empleo y educación después que se gradúen de la escuela secundaria/preparatoria.
- Las percepciones de los alumnos del proceso de planeación durante las juntas de PEI.
- Las expectativas de ayuda de sus padres y maestros que tienen los alumnos durante las actividades de planeación.
- El nivel de confianza y estrategias para ponerse metas, toma de decisiones, y auto-evaluación.

Además, llevaré a cabo las siguientes dos actividades:

3.Repaso del Plan Individual de Transición (PIT) del alumno: Pediré el tener acceso a los PITs de los participantes. Al permitir que su hijo(a) participe en este proyecto, usted me está dando permiso para tener acceso a estos documentos confidenciales.
4. Observación de reuniones de Planeación Individual de Transición (PIT): Me reuniré con usted y su hijo(a) durante la junta de PIT anual. Estas juntas por lo general se llaman ARD. Durante estas reuniones, yo estaré presente pero no participaré en la discusión. Solamente voy a observar y tomar notas.

¿Cuáles son los posibles riesgos de participacíón?
Es posible que la entrevista de grupo incluya discusiones acerca de temas de cómo es el tener dificultades y discapacidades de aprendizaje y el planear para la edad adulta, un tema que puede ser difícil de discutir para mucha gente. Si su hijo(a) tiene preocupaciones después de la entrevista, el/ella puede hablar con el consejero de su escuela para que le ayude con ésto. El número se da a continuación:

Nombre del Consejero: _____El número de teléfono:_____

Si usted o su hijo(a) quieren discutir la información descrita arriba o cualquier otro posible riesgo que el/ella pudiese experimentar, pueden preguntarme ahora o llamarme luego, Audrey Trainor, por teléfono al 474-0159. Pueden también ponerse en contacto con la Profesora Alba Ortíz al 471-6244).

¿Cuáles son los posibles beneficios para usted y otras personas?
Es posible que la participación en esta investigación le ayude a su hijo(a) a pensar acerca de las opciones que el/ella tendrá durante su cambio de la adolescencia a la vida adulta. Por ejemplo, conforme se acerca la graduación de su hijo(a), el/ella necesitará decidir si quiere ir a la universidad o encontrar un empleo después de la escuela secundaria/preparatoria. Sin embargo, es también posible que la investigación no tenga ningún beneficio personal para su hijo(a).

Finalmente, los resultados de esta investigación tienen el potencial de beneficiar a alumnos con problemas de aprendizaje porque la investigación puede informar a maestros e investigadores acerca de las estrategias de planeación para el futuro de los alumnos pertenecientes a una variedad de razas.

¿Le costará algo a usted algo si decide darle permiso a su hijo(a) de participar en esta investigación?
No hay ningún costo para usted, el padre del participante, o su hijo(a), el alumno(a) participante.

¿Recibirá usted dinero por su participacíón en la investigacíon?
Sí, si su hijo participa, el/ella recibirá un certificado de regalo de Target con valor de $50 dólares. El certificado se le entregará después de su participación en la entrevista individual.

¿Y qué pasa si tiene alguna herida como resultado de la investigación?
Esta investigación no tiene riesgos físicos.

¿Cuáles son otras opciones que usted tiene si no quiere participar en esta investigación?
La participación en esta investigación es totalmente voluntaria. Tiene usted el derecho de negar su participación en la investigación sin problemas con su relación presente o futura con la Universidad de Tejas en Austin o el Distrito Escolar Independiente de _____.

¿Cómo puede retractarse de esta investigación?
Si desea retractar su permiso para la participación de su hijo por cualquier razón, deberá llamar a Audrey Trainor al (512) 474-0159. Tiene usted la libertad de detener su consentimiento y parar la participación en esta investigación en cualquier momento sin castigo o pérdida de beneficios que tiene actualmente. Durante esta investigación, la investigadora le notificará de nueva información que esté disponible y que pueda afectar su decisión de permanecer en la investigación.

Su decisión de darle permiso a su hijo(a) de que participe no afecta sus relaciones presentes o futuras con la Universidad de Tejas o el Distrito Escolar Independiente de _____. Si tiene cualquier pregunta acerca de la investigación, por favor pregúnteme. Si tiene preguntas después, usted puede llamarme por teléfono al 474-0159.

Además, si tiene preguntas acerca de sus derechos como participante de una investigación, por favor póngase en contacto con Clarke A. Burnham, Ph.D., de el Departamento de Protección de Participantes de la Universidad de Tejas en Austin al (512) 232-4383.

¿Cómo se protegerá su privacidad y confidencialidad de los documentos de participacíon en la investigación?
Algunas personas de la universidad tienen derecho de leer y proteger la confidencialidad de los documentos de investigación. Si el proyecto de investigación está siendo fundado por alguien, entonces los fiadores también tienen derecho a repasar mis documentos. En otras circunstancias, los documentos de investigación no serán revelados sin su consentimiento.

Si los resultados de esta investigación son publicados o presentados en alguna reunión escolar, la identidad de los alumnos permanecerá anónima. Es posible que se requiera presentar videos en convenciones o demostraciones en salones de clase para algunos investigadores y maestros. Por favor firme si está dispuesto(a) a permitirnos usar los videos creados durante la investigación con este propósito.

Cualquier información que se obtenga relacionada con la investigación y que pueda ser usada para identificar a su hijo será confidencial y usada únicamente con su permiso. Sus respuestas no serán usadas en conexión con su nombre en ninguno de los reportes escritos o verbales de este proyecto de investigación.

This study will involve interviews that will be recorded on audio- and videotapes. The cassettes will be coded so that no personally identifying information is visible on them. The cassettes will also be kept in a secure place. The only people who will hear or view the tapes will do so only for research purposes. After the study, the tapes will be stored for future analysis.

Este estudio involucrará entrevistas que serán grabadas en audio y videocintas. Las cintas serán codificadas para que ninguna información que pueda ser vinculada con la identificación de los participantes sea visible. Las cintas también se mantendrán en un lugar seguro. Las únicas personas que escucharán o verán las cintas lo harán sólo con propósitos de investigación. Después del estudio, las cintas serán guardadas para análisis futuros.

¿Se beneficiarán los investigadores de su participación en esta investigación?
La investigadora se beneficiaría de la participación de su hijo(a) porque ella podría cumplir con los requisitos de trabajo para su programa en la universidad.

Firmas
Como represantante de esta investigación, he explicado el propósito, los procedimientos, los beneficios posibles riesgos involucrados en esta investigación.

Firma y nombre impreso de la persona buscando consentimiento/Fecha

Usted ha sido informado acerca del propósito de esta investigación, los procedimientos, los beneficios, y posibles riesgos de esta investigación. También ha recibido una copia de esta forma. Se le ha dado la oportunidad de hacer preguntas antes de firmar y se le ha dicho que puede hacer otras preguntas en cualquier momento. Usted ha accedido a participar en esta investigación voluntariamente. Al firmar esta forma, no pierde ninguno de sus derechos legales.

Nombre Impreso del joven adolescente (su hijo/a)/Fecha
Firma del Padre o Guardianes Legales (Usted)/Fecha
Firma de la Investigadora Principal/Fecha

He leído la descripción de la investigación con el título "Planeando para la Vida Adulta: Preferencias de Auto-determinación y Comportamientos de Alumnos con Discapacidades en el Aprendizaje" que se encuentra arriba, y entiendo cuáles son los procedimientos y lo que pasará en la investigación. He recibido permiso de mis padres para participar en la investigación y estoy de acuerdo en participar. Sé que puedo dejar la investigación en cualquier momento.

Fecha del alumno, menor de edad/Fecha

Doy permiso para el uso de video (audio) cintas que se hagan de documentos utilizados para esta investigación con propósitos educacionales.

Nombre de alumno, menor de edad/Fecha
Firma de los Padres o Guardianes Legales/Fecha
Firma de la Investigadora Principal/Fecha

IRB# 2002-03-0053
Informed Consent to Participate in Research
CONSENT FORM, The University of Texas at Austin

You are being asked to give permission for your son/daughter to participate in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. The Principal Investigator (the person in charge of this research) or his/her representative will also describe this study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you don't understand before deciding whether or not to take part. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Title of Research Study:
Planning for Life After High School: Self-Determination Preferences and Behaviors of Students with Learning Disabilities

Principal Investigator(s) and Telephone Number(s):
Audrey Trainor, graduate student 474-0159
Alba Ortiz, Ph.D. 471-6244

Funding source:
Not funded.

What is the purpose of this study?
This study is part of my work to complete my Ph.D. degree. I am a student at The University of Texas at Austin, Department of Special Education. I am asking for permission to include your son/daughter in this study because he/she is a high school student with a learning disability. He or she will be involved in planning what he or she will do after high school. I expect to include 15-18 participants in the study.

The purpose of this study is to examine the self-determination perceptions and practices of African American, Hispanic, and White students during transition planning in preparation for life after high school. This study addresses the question, How does cultural identity impact the use of self-determination during transition planning?

What will be done if you take part in this research study?
This research project includes two meetings. The research will be conducted in Spring 2002 and Fall 2003. During this time, I will need student participation in the following activities:

1. Focus group interviews: He or she will participate in a focus group interview with a group of 5-6 similar teens. This will take approximately 1.5 hours after school. The group will meet only one time, and the meeting will be held at an area school or library. I will videotape the interviews.

2. Follow-up individual interviews: Each participant will be contacted by me after the focus group interview to arrange a follow-up interview. This interview will take approximately one hour or less, and will also be videotaped. The purpose of this interview is to give participants the chance to comment and reflect on their remarks from the focus group interview. This can be conducted in the home of the participant, or at some other convenient location.

   Topics that will be address during the focus group interviews include:
   - Students' plans for employment and education after they graduate from high school.
   - Students' perceptions of the planning process during IEP meetings.
   - Students' expectations of help from their parents and teachers during planning activities.
   - Students' comfort level and approach to goal setting, decision making, and self-assessment.

   In addition, I will conduct the following two activities:

3. Review of the student's Individual Transition Plan (ITP): I will request access to participants' ITPs. By allowing your child to take part in this project, you are giving me access to these confidential documents.

4. Observation of Individual Transition Plan (ITP) meetings: I will join you and your son/daughter during the annual ITP meeting with your child's teacher. These meetings are usually called ARD meetings. During the meetings, I will be present, but I will not participate in the discussion. Instead I will be making observations and taking notes.

What are the possible discomforts and risks?
The focus group interview will involve an honest discussion about what it is like to have a learning disability and plan for adulthood, a topic some people find difficult to discuss.

If you or your child wishes to discuss the information above or any other risks he or she may experience, you may ask questions now or call me, Audrey Trainor, later at 474-0159. You may also contact Alba Ortiz, Ph.D., at 471-6244.

What are the possible benefits to you or to others?
Participation in this study may help your child to think about choices he/she will face as he/she moves from being a teenager to becoming an adult. For example, as your child gets closer to graduation, he/she will need to decide whether to go to college or get a job after high school. It is possible, however, that the study will not be personally beneficial to your child.

Ultimately, the results of this study have the potential to benefit students with learning disabilities by informing teachers and researchers about the practice of transition planning for students who are from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

If you choose to take part in this study, will it cost you anything?
There is no cost to you, the parent of the participant, or to the student participant.

Will you receive compensation for your participation in this study?
Yes, if your child participates, upon completion of the individual follow-up interview, he/she will receive a $50 gift certificate to Target Department Stores.

What if you are injured because of the study?
This study does not involve physical risk.

If you do not want to take part in this study, what other options are available to you?
Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to refuse to be in the study, and your refusal will not influence current or future relationships with The University of Texas at Austin or the _____ Independent School District (SMSD).

How can you withdraw from this research study?

If you wish to stop your child's participation in this research study for any reason, you should contact: Audrey Trainor at (512) 474-0159. You are free to withdraw your consent and stop participation in this research study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits for which you may be entitled. Throughout the study, the researchers will notify you of new information that may become available and that might affect your decision to remain in the study.

Your decision to allow your son/daughter to participate will not affect your or his or her present or future relationship with The University of Texas at Austin or the _____ Independent Schools District (SMSD). If you have any questions about the study, please ask me. If you have any questions later, call me at 474-0159.

In addition, if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Clarke A. Burnham, Ph.D., Chair, The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, 512/232-4383.

How will your privacy and the confidentiality of your research records be protected?

Authorized persons from The University of Texas at Austin and the Institutional Review Board have the legal right to review my research records and will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law. If the research project is sponsored then the sponsor(s) also have the legal right to review my research records. Otherwise, your research records will not be released without your consent unless required by law or a court order.

If the results of this research are published or presented at scientific meetings, your identity will not be disclosed. We may wish to present some of the tapes from this study at scientific conventions or as demonstrations in classrooms. Please sign below if you are willing to allow us to do so with the tape of your performance

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with your son/daughter will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. His or her responses will not be linked to his or her name or your name in any written or verbal report of this research project.

This study will involve interviews that will be recorded on audio- and videotapes. The cassettes will be coded so that no personally identifying information is visible on them. The cassettes will also be kept in a secure place. The only people who will hear or view the tapes will do so only for research purposes. After the study, the tapes will be stored for future analysis.

Will the researchers benefit from your participation in this *study?*
The researcher will benefit from your participation in this study by being able to complete the requirements for her degree.

Signatures:

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in this research study:
Signature and printed name of person obtaining consent/Date

You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.
Printed Name of Adolescent youth/Date
Signature of Parent(s) or Legal Guardian/Date
Signature of Principal Investigator/Date

I have read the description of the study titled "Planning for Life After High School: Self-Determination Preferences and Behaviors of Students with Learning Disabilities" that is printed above, and I understand what the procedures are and what will happen to me in the study. I have received permission from my parent(s) to participate in the study, and I agree to participate in it. I know that I can quit the study at any time.
Signature of Minor/Date

I hereby give permission for the video (audio) tape made for this research study to be also used for educational purposes.
Printed Name of Adolescent youth/Date
Signature of Parent(s) or Legal Guardian/Date
Signature of Principal Investigator/Date

APPENDIX D

Participant Recruitment Documents for School Liaisons

Recruitment Procedure and Participant Criteria

1. Determine which students meet the criteria for participation in this study:
    - Male
    - At least 16 years old
    - Handicapping condition is LD
    - Receives, or is eligible to receive, free/reduced cost lunch
2. Eliminate students who declined during previous contact.
3. Send packets with cover letter and consent forms.
4. Contact families by telephone and ask parents/guardians and the student if they consent to participation. Explain there is a $50 gift certificate as compensation for participants' time and effort.
5. Secure permission by having *both* the parent/guardian and the student sign the consent form.
6. Give signed consent forms to Audrey Trainor.

Telephone Script for School Liaisons

Greeting	Hi, I'm _____, a teacher at your son's school. I recently sent you a letter about a research project involving a graduate student at UT.
Reason for calling.	I'd like to talk to you about whether you are interested in having your son participate in the study. Have you received the permission information? Did you have a chance to read the material in the letter? Do you have any questions for me?
Benefits of Study	By participating in this study, your son will help provide teachers with important information about the needs of students with learning disabilities as they plan for college or employment. This study is being conducted by a graduate student, so your son's participation will help her complete her degree. Upon completion of participation in the study, your son will receive a $50 gift certificate to Target in appreciation for his participation.
No obligation	You are not obligated in any way to participate in this study.
Q & A	The study involves two interviews. One is a group interview, and one is an individual interview. The total time needed will be about 3 hours. The researcher will contact you to determine the time and location of the interviews. Let me jot that question down and I will ask the researcher and get back to you.
Closing	Thanks for your time. If verbal permission granted: Let's arrange a time for me to get your written permission slip. Please notice your son must also sign this slip. You can ask your son to bring the permission slip to me at school. The researcher will make a copy for your records. If parent/student is not interested: Thanks, I appreciate your time.

APPENDIX E

Spanish and English Follow Up Letter to Participants

Estimados Padres y Alumnos:

Gracias por estar de acuerdo en participar en mi investigacíon. Recibí su forma de permiso y le estoy dando una copia a Usted. Les llamaré cuando sepa el tiempo y el lugar de la reunión para las entrevistas. Si tiene preguntas o por cualquier razón necesita hablar conmigo, llámeme al número que está arriba en esta carta.

Otra vez, quiero decirles que su participación es muy importante para mí y por eso les estoy muy agradecida. Ojalá que Ustedes se beneficien también, Como un incentivo por la participación de los alumnos, cada uno recibirá un certificado de Target con valor de $50 dólares que les será entregado después de su participación en la entrevista individual.

Sinceramente,

Audrey Trainor

Dear Parents/Guardians and Students:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. I have received your written permission slip and I am enclosing a copy for your records. I will contact you regarding the available times and places for the interviews. Should you have any questions or need to contact me for any reason, feel free to call me. My phone number is listed at the top of this page.

Again, I want to let you know that your participation in my study is very much appreciated. I hope that you will benefit from it as well. As an incentive for student participation, each participant will receive a $50 gift certificate to Target upon completion of the individual interview.

Sincerely,

Audrey Trainor

APPENDIX F

Focus Group Interview Procedures for Moderator Aides

Big Goals:

Get participants to feel comfortable enough to talk.

Get participants to talk about topic: self-determination and transition planning.

My Role as Moderator:

Facilitate the group discussion.

Ask open-ended questions.

Probe when participant's statements warrant explanation or further comment.

Provide guidelines and direction if conversation goes off topic.

Facilitate appropriate participation from all participants.

End the interview.

(from Vaughn, Shumm, & Sinagub, 1996)

Your Role as Moderator Aide:

Help me with arrangements at the beginning of the meeting (i.e.,,, chairs).

Make participants feel comfortable (i.e.,,, be friendly, introduce self).

Help with the camera and other recording equipment.

Actively listen to the interview, take notes.

Assist in the facilitation of appropriate participation.

Help me wrap up at the end of the group.

APPENDIX G

Follow up Questionnaire for Participants

Name: _____

School: _____

Grade: _____ Age: _____

Address:

_____

_____

Phone: _____

Do you have your driver's license? _____yes

_____no

Where and when can I contact you for the follow up interview?

_____

_____

References

Anzul, M., Evans, J. F., King, R., & Teller-Robinson, D. (2001). Moving beyond a deficit perspective with qualitative research methods. *Exceptional Children, 67,* 235-264.

August, D., & Hakuta, K. (Eds.). (1997). Assessment. In *Improving schooling for language-minority children: A research agenda* (pp.113 - 125). Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Aune, B., & Friehe, M. (1996, May). Transition to postsecondary education: Institutional and individual issues. *Topics in Language Disorders, 16*(3), 1-22.

Bailey, D. Jr., Skinner, D., Rodriguez, P., Gut, D., & Correa, V. (1999). Awareness, use, and satisfaction with services for Latino parents of young children with disabilities. *Exceptional Children, 65,* 367 - 381.

Bassett, D. S., & Lehmann, J. (2002). *Student-focused conferencing and planning*. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

Behar, R. (1996). *The vulnerable observer*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Benz, M. R., & Halpern, A. S. (1987). Transition services for secondary students with mild disabilities: A state wide perspective. *Exceptional Children, 53,* 507-514.

Benz, M. R., Lindstrom, L., & Yovanoff, P. (2000). Improving graduation and employment outcomes of students with disabilities: Predictive factors and student perspectives. *Exceptional Children, 66,* 509-529.

Blackorby, J., & Wagner, M. (1996). Longitudinal postschool outcomes of youth with disabilities: Findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study. *Exceptional Children, 62,* 399-413.

Blalock, G., & Patton, J. R. (1996). Transition and students with learning disabilities: Creating sound futures. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 29,* 7-16.

Brinckerhoff, L. C. (1996). Making the transition to higher education: Opportunities for student empowerment. In J. R. Patton & G. Blalock (Eds.), *Transition and students with learning disabilities: Facilitating movement from school to adult life* (pp. 157-189). Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

Clark, G. M., & Patton, J. R. (1997). *Transition Planning Inventory*. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

Coffey, A., & Atkinson, P. (1996). *Making sense of qualitative data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Collet-Klingenberg, L. L. (1998). The reality of best practices in transitions: A case study. *Exceptional Children, 65,* 67-78.

Colley, D. A., & Jamison, D. (1998). Post-school results for youth with disabilities: Key indicators and policy implications. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals, 21,* 145-160.

Cook-Slater, A. (2002). Authorizing student perspectives: Toward trust, dialogue, and change in education. *Educational Researcher, 31*(4), 3-14.

Cozzens, G., Dowdy, C. A., Smith, T. E. C. (1999). *Adult agencies: Linkages for adolescents in transition.* Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York: Plenum Press.

Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children*. New York: New York Press.

Deyhle, D., & LeCompte, M. (1999). Cultural differences in child development: Navajo adolescents in middle schools. In R. H. Sheets & E. R. Hollins (Eds.), *Racial and ethnic identity in school practices* (pp.123-139). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Dunbar, C. Jr., Rodriguez, D., & Parker, L. (2002). Race, subjectivity, and the interview process. In G. F Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Dunn, C. (1996). A status report on transition planning for individuals with learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 29,* 17-30.

Durlak, C. M., Rose, E., & Bursuck, W. D. (1994). Preparing high school students with learning disabilities for the transition to postsecondary education: Teaching the skills of self-determination. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 27,* 51 - 59.

Eder, D., & Fingerson, L. (2002). Interviewing children and adolescents. In G. F Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Field, S. (1996). Self-determination instructional strategies for youth with learning disabilities. In J. R. Patton & G. Blalock (Eds.), *Transition and students with learning disabilities: Facilitating movement from school to adult life* (pp. 61-84). Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

Field, S., & Hoffman, A. (1994). Development of a model for self-determination. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals,17*(2), 159-169.

Field, S., & Hoffman, A. (1996). *Steps to self-determination: A curriculum to help adolescents learn to achieve their goals.* Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

Field, S., Hoffman, A., Spezia, S. (1998). *Self-determination strategies for adolescents in transition.* Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

García, S. B., Mendez-Pérez, A., & Ortiz, A. A. (2000). Interpreting Mexican-American mothers' beliefs about language disabilities from a sociocultural perspective. *Remedial and Special Education, 21,* 90-102.

Gay, G. (1999). Ethnic identity development and multicultural education. In R. H. Sheets & E. R. Hollins (Eds.), *Racial and ethnic identity in school practices* (pp.195-211). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Geenen, S., Powers, L. E., Lopez-Vasquez, A. (2001). Multicultural aspects of parent involvement in transition planning. *Exceptional Children, 67,* 265-282.

Gottfredson, D. C., Marciniak, E. M., Birdseye, A. T., & Gottfredson, G. D. (1995). Increasing teacher expectations for student achievement. *Journal of Educational Research, 88,* 155-162.

Greene, G., & Nefsky, P. (1999). Transition for culturally and linguistically diverse youth with disabilities: Closing the gaps. *Multiple Voices, 3*(1), 15-24.

Greenfield, P.M. (1994). Independence and interdependence as developmental scripts: Implications for theory, research, and practice. In P.M. Greenfield & R. R. Cocking (Eds.), *Cross-cultural roots of minority child development* (pp. 1-37). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Gudykunst, W. B., & Kim, Y. Y. (1997). *Communicating with strangers: An approach to intercultural communication* (3rd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Halpern, A. S. (1985). Transition: A look at the future foundations. *Exceptional Children, 64,* 513 - 528.

Harris, S. M., & Halpin, G. (2002). Development and validation of the factors influencing pursuit of higher education questionnaire. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 62*, 79-96.

Harry, B. (1992). *Cultural diversity, families, and the special education system*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Harry, B., Rueda, R., & Kalyanpur, M. (1999). Cultural reciprocity in sociocultural perspective: Adapting the normalization principle for family collaboration. *Exceptional Children, 66,* 123-136.

Hayes, K. G. (1992). Attitudes toward education: Voluntary and involuntary immigrants from the same families. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 23,* 250-267.

Hasazi, S.B., Furney, K. S., & Destefano, L. (1999). Implementing the IDEA transition mandates. *Exceptional Children, 65,* 555-567.

Heath, S. B. (1983/1999). *Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Herrnstein, J.R., & Murray, C. (1994). *The bell curve: Intelligence and class structure in America*. New York: Free Press.

Hildebrand, V., Phenice, L. A., Gray, M. M., & Hines, R. P. (1996). *Knowing and serving diverse families*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Merrill.

Hill, S. A. (1999). *African American Children: Socialization and development in families*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Hilliard III, A. G. (1980). Cultural diversity and special education. *Exceptional Children, 46,* 584-588.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997, 20 U. S. C. A. 1414 et seq.

Kalyanpur, M., & Harry, B. (1999). *Culture in special education: Building reciprocal family-professional relationships*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brooks Publishing Co., Inc.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The Dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass.

LeCompte, M. D., & Schensul, J. J. (1999). *Analyzing and interpreting ethnographic data*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.

Lee, J. (2002). Racial and ethnic achievement gap trends: Reversing the progress toward equity. *Educational Researcher, 31*(1), 3-12.

Lehmann, J. P., Bassett, D. S., & Sands, D. J. (1999). Students' participation in transition-related actions. *Remedial and Special Education, 20,* 160-169.

Lieblich. A., Tuval-Mashiach, R., & Zilber, T. (1998). *Narrative research: Reading, analysis, and interpretation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Ludi, D. C., & Martin, L. (1995). The road to personal freedom: Self-determination. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 30,* 164-169.

Martin, J. E., & Huber-Marshall, L. H. (1995). Choicemaker: A comprehensive self-determination transition program. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 30,* 147-156.

Mertens, D. M., & McLaughlin, J. A. (1995). *Research methods in special education*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Michaels, C. A. (Ed.). (1994). Transition, adolescence, and learning disabilities. In *Transition strategies for persons with learning disabilities* (pp. 1-22). San Diego, CA: Singular Publishing Group, Inc.

Miner, C. A., & Bates, P.E. (1997, June). The effect of person centered planning activities on the IEP/transition planning process. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities,* 105-112.

Morningstar, M. E., Turnbull, A. P., & Turnbull, H. R. (1995). What do students with disabilities tell us about the importance of family involvement in the transition from school to adult life? *Exceptional Children, 62,* 249-260.

National Center for Education Statistics. (1994). National education longitudinal study of 1988 eighth graders. Retrieved March 17, 2003, from http://nces.ed.gov/quicktables/Detail.asp?key=63

National Center for Education Statistics. (1998). Beginning postsecondary students longitudinal study. Retrieved March 17, 2003, from http://nces.ed.gov/quicktables/showTable.asp?pubNumber=18&tableNumber=10

National Center for Education Statistics. (1999a). Dropout and completion measures. Retrieved August 22, 2001, from http://nces.ed.gov/quicktables/Detail.asp?SrchKeyWord=dropouts&Key=266&optSearch=exact&quarter=&topic=All&survey=All&sortby=

National Center for Education Statistics. (1999b). Racial/ethnic distribution of public school students. Retrieved February 22, 2002, from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2001/section1/tables/t03_1.html

National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities. (1996, May). A position paper of the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities: January 1994. *Topics in Language Disorders,16,* 69-73.

National Research Council. (2002). *Minority students in special and gifted education*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Patton, J. R., Cronin, M. E., & Jairrels, V. (1997). Curricular implications of transition. *Remedial and Special Education, 18,* 294-306.

Patton, J. R., Cronin, M. E., & Wood, S. J. (1999). *Infusing real-life topics into existing curricula*. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

Patton, J. R., & Dunn, C. (1998). *Transition from school to young adulthood*. Austin, TX: ProEd.

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications.

Phillips, P. (1990). A self-advocacy plan for high school students with learning disabilities: A comparative case analysis of students', teachers', and parents perceptions of program effects. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 23,* 466-471.

Pugach, M. C., (2001). The stories we choose to tell: Fulfilling the promise of qualitative research for special education. *Exceptional Children, 67,* 439-453.

Rojewski, G. W. (1996). Educational and occupational aspirations of high school seniors with disabilities. *Exceptional Children, 62,* 463-476.

Romo, H. D., & Falbo, T. (1996). *Latino high school graduation: Defying the odds*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Sanchez, W. (1996). Special education advocacy and Latino clients: Empowerment and becoming a good consumer. *Special Services in Schools, 12,* 87-107.

Scheurich, J. J. (1997). *Research method in the postmodern*. London: Falmer Press.

Schloss, P. J., Alper, S., & Jayne, D. (1994). Self-determination for persons with disabilities: Choice, risk, and dignity. *Exceptional Children, 60,* 215-255.

Seale, C. F. (2002) Computer-assisted analysis of qualitative interview data. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Ed.) *Handbook of interview research.* Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage Publications.

Seidman, I. (1998). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and social sciences*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Serna, L. A., & Lau-Smith, J. (1995). Learning with a purpose: Self-Determination skills for students who are at risk for school failure and community failure. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 30,* 142-146.

Skinner, D., Bailey, D. B., Correa, V., & Rodriguez, P. (1999). Narrating self and disability: Latino mothers' construction of identities vis-à-vis their child with special needs. *Exceptional Children, 65,* 481-495.

Sleeter, C. E. (2001). Preparing teachers for culturally diverse schools. *Journal of Teacher Education, 52,* 94-106.

Smith, T. E. C., Polloway, E. A., Patton, J. R., & Dowdy, C. A. (2001). *Teaching students with special needs in inclusive settings* (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Stanton-Salazar, R. D. (2001). *Manufacturing hope and despair: The school and kin support networks of U.S.-Mexican Youth*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Stodden, R. A., & Boone, R. (1987). Assessing transition services for handicapped youth: A cooperative interagency approach. *Exceptional Children, 53,* 537-545.

Sturomski, N. (1996, May). The transition of individuals with learning disabilities into the work setting. *Topics in Language Disorders,16,* 37-51.

Tatum, B. D. (1997). *"Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?"* New York: Basic Books.

Texas Education Agency. (2001). Accountability data tables. Retrieved March 29, 2002, from http://www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/account/2001/

Thoma, C. A., Nathanson, R., Baker, S. R., Tamura, R. (2002). Self-Determination: What do special educators know and where do they learn it? *Remedial and Special Education, 23,*242-247.

Thorp, E. K. (1997). Increasing opportunities for partnership with culturally and linguistically diverse families. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 32,* 261-269.

Torres-Velásquez. D. (Ed.). (1999). Sociocultural perspectives in special education. *Remedial and Special Education,* 20,

Trueba, E. T. (1999). *Latinos Unidos: From cultural diversity to the politics of solidarity*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

U.S. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. (2000). *Twenty-second annual report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. Washington, DC: Department of Education.

Valdez, J. R. (2000). Searching for a path out of poverty: Exploring the achievement ideology of a rural community college. *Adult Education Quarterly, 50,* 212-230.

Valencia, R. (1997). *The evolution of deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice*. London: Falmer Press.

Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive Schooling: U.S. Mexican youth and the politics of caring. New York: SUNY Press.*

Van Reusen, A. K., & Bos, C. S. (1990). IPLAN: Helping students communicate in planning conferences. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 22*(4), 20-32.

Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, J. (1996). *Focus group interviews in education and psychology.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Vélez-Ibánez, C. G., & Greenberg, J. B. (1992). Formation and transformation of knowledge among U.S.-Mexican households. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 24,* 313-335.

Voltz, D. L. (1994). Developing collaborative parent-teacher relationships with culturally diverse parents. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 29,* 288-291.

Wehmeyer, M. (1992). Self-Determination and the education of students with mental retardation. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation, 27,* 303-314.

Wehmeyer, M. (1995a). A career education approach: Self-determination for youth with mild cognitive disabilities. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 30,* 157-163.

Wehmeyer, M. (1995b). *Whose future is it anyway? A student directed transition planning process.* Arlington, TX: The Arc National Headquarters.

Wehmeyer, M. L., & Lawrence, M. (1995). Whose future is it anyway? Promoting student involvement in transition planning. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals, 18*(2), 69-83.

Wehmeyer, M. L., Morningstar, M., & Husted, D. (1999). *Family involvement in transition planning and implementation.* Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

Wehmeyer, M. L., Palmer, S. B., Agran, M., Mithaug, D. E., & Martin, J. (2000). Promoting causal agency: The self-determined learning model of instruction. *Exceptional Children, 66*, 439-453.

Wehmeyer, M. L., & Schwartz, M. (1997). Self-determination and positive adult outcomes: A follow-up study of youth with mental retardation or learning disabilities. *Exceptional Children, 63,* 245-255.

Will, M. (1984). OSERS programming for the transition of youth with disabilities: Bridges from school to working life. Washington, DC: Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

Wolfe, P. S., Boone, R. S., & Barrera, M. (1997). Developing culturally sensitive transition plans: A reflective process. *The Journal for Vocational Special Needs Education, 30*(1), 30-33.

Zhang, D., Katsiyannis, A., & Zhang, J. (2002). Teacher and parent practice on fostering seld-determination of high school students with mild disabilities. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals, 25,* 171-168).

Vita

Audrey Ann Trainor was born on August 23, 1967, in Indianapolis, Indiana. She spent most of her childhood in Champaign, Illinois, before moving to Greensboro, North Carolina to attend college at UNC Greensboro for her bachelor's degree in Linguistics. Shortly thereafter she moved to Osaka, Japan, to teach English to Japanese middle school students. She received her master's degree in Special Education from UNCG while teaching high school students with learning disabilities. After teaching high school for eight years, she moved to Austin, Texas, in pursuit of her Ph.D. in 1999.

Permanent address: 4010 B Maplewood Avenue, Austin, TX, 78722

This dissertation was typed by Audrey Ann Trainor.